



THE PROBLEM

HOPE GLADDEN

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THE PROBLEM

HOPE GLADDEN



RICHARD G. BADGER
THE GORHAM PRESS
BOSTON

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THE GORHAM PRESS, BOSTON, U. S. A.

To My Nieces
HELEN AND DOROTHY

SRLF
URL

MC 4659610

*He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest;
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.
Robert Browning.*

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CHAPTER I

THE SURPRISE

THERE was scarcely a person, place, or thing around the charming village of Woodrow that Dr. Hunt M. Warren did not know and love. It was, therefore, no wonder that the people of that place loved him; or that Grandma Adams when she fell and broke her wrist, or little Susie Plummer when she had the croup wanted Dr. Warren instead of the young Dr. Ellery who had recently settled there, and had made his brags about feeding Warren's horses on straw before the season was over.

The people of that little town were a genuine people who recognized and appreciated true worth, and never more so than in their tried and trusted friend who had stood so loyally by them in storm and sunshine.

One morning, in the latter part of August, Dr. Warren waked, turned over, looked at his watch, and wondered how much longer he might allow himself this luxury. His wondering lasted, however, for scarcely more than a second; for, almost instantly, he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs on

the gravel walk, and soon after a vigorous ring of the door bell.

Ned Munson was at the door. His mother was ill and needed the Doctor at once. The latter, on seeing Ned's horse standing by the gate, wet with sweat and with the white froth dripping from his mouth, said:

"All right, Ned. Will come as soon as possible, but you better stand your horse under the shade trees to cool off a bit."

He then turned to call Si, who slept in a small room off the kitchen, but Si had also heard the bell and was nearly dressed.

While the Doctor donned the thinnest summer suit he possessed, Si went to the stable to harness Nell, the Doctor's little bay mare that certainly held her own place in the Warren family.

After hitching the mare into the thills, Si stepped to the side of the carriage to replace the cushion. It was the man's custom, whenever the carriage came in, to tilt the cushion bottom side up against the dasher in order better to protect it from dust and horse hairs; because, as he said, "It's mighty hard to brush out around them buttons."

This morning, as he reached for the cushion, his heart almost stood still. The rubber boot that he had left tucked in the pocket in front of the dasher had been removed and carefully spread so as practically to conceal a willow basket hidden beneath its folds, and yet raised a sufficient height to allow the air to pass to the place that needed

it most. This was the first time that Si had even glanced at the carriage itself, or rather at the inside of it. He quickly threw the boot aside, and there, enjoying the sweetest sleep, lay a tiny infant about two months old.

"By crackers!" said Si, under his breath.

This was an expression peculiar to the man, and one that he always used in times of great surprise, whether of gladness, or sorrow, or just "common surprise," as his mother used to say.

During this time the Doctor had dressed, drunk the eggnog that his wife had prepared meanwhile, and which often served for his morning meal on occasions like this. As Si had not brought the team around, the Doctor picked up his medicine case, gave Mrs. Warren a parting kiss, told her she had better "trot back to bed for an hour," and then walked out through the shed into the stable.

Three steps led from one to the other, and as the Doctor went down these, he heard Si's exclamation and noticed the expression on his face. After those two words were uttered, the fellow seemed speechless; and, when the Doctor stepped to the carriage, it was his turn to be surprised. For several moments the tall, broadshouldered man stood there, one hand holding his medicine case, the other resting on the dasher. He stared long and hard at the tiny creature. His brain was working on one of life's problems. At last, as though realizing that something must be done, he set the case on the seat, threw the cover aside, and

almost reverently lifted the basket from its resting place. As he did so, the morning light from the doorway shone on the baby's face, and eyes as blue as the heavens looked up into his. The delicate eyelids winked again and again, and then the tiny fist was raised and rubbed over those little eyes and the finely shaped nose. A great gap followed, but not the slightest cry was uttered. The Doctor was about to carry the little stranger into the house when the thought came to him that the shock might be too great for Mrs. Warren unless he prepared her for it.

After passing the basket to Si, with the words, "Hold it a minute," he walked slowly and thoughtfully into the house, wondering how to break the news to his wife.

The Doctor was a part of her very life. Never had she grown indifferent to his absence, and she was always watching for his return. As she heard his footsteps, she turned from the window, where she sat watching for the carriage to drive away, and one glance at his face told her that something had happened. She had slipped on a dainty pink and white kimona of the finest lawn. Her hair was naturally wavy, and he thought that she had never looked more lovable than she did when she rose to meet him with the words:

"What, dear?"

The word, "what" was so full of meaning that it might have covered anything or everything, and the "dear" was so tender whenever it came from

her lips that it seemed to him the angels must hear.

Laying one hand on each of her shoulders, he said:

"Can Mother take a surprise this morning?"

He had called her "Mother" ever since their little Angie was born, even though the child had lived only a few months. Since that time the little woman had not been strong, but she was brave, and when her husband spoke in those quiet, even tones, she always prepared herself for whatever might come.

Again, in the same tones, she said:

"What, dear?"

"There is a surprise out here. I have something to show you. Will you come out, or shall I bring it in?"

She looked at him earnestly, and then said:

"I'll come."

Taking her arm, the Doctor led her into the stable where Si stood just where he had left him; he did not speak, but simply pointed to the basket.

Mrs. Warren looked first at the baby, and then at her husband, again and again until, with tears in her eyes, she let go his arm and reached toward the basket for the baby. The child saw her; and, as though catching the "mother look" in her eyes, stretched out her little hands and cooed. As Mrs. Warren lifted her from the basket, something fell. The Doctor stooped to pick up the long, stiff envelope, which to his surprise was addressed to himself. Within, he found not only a letter bearing

his name, but another smaller envelope, securely sealed, bearing the inscription: "Willa, to be opened on her 21st birthday."

His own letter read:

"Dear and kind Sir:

"Through circumstances that I am unable to help, I must either give my child away, or put her in some institution. I cannot seem to do the latter, and if I must do the former, I know of no one to whom I would so willingly let her go as to you and Mrs. Warren. I have never seen either of you, but I have heard much of both and of your kind-heartedness. As you would wish your own little girl cared for had she lived, so please care for this one.

"In case the question is arising in your minds, let me say that she is legitimate. God alone knows how it breaks my heart to let her go.

"In the other envelope are some papers that may be of interest to Willa when she is of age. I would ask you for good and sacred reasons to hold them as a trust until her 21st birthday. She was born on the 17th of June, and is now ten weeks old.

"If you wish to be truly kind, do not try to trace her. I cannot write more. My heart is breaking. Her father is dead, and I shall go soon.

"Very respectfully,

"WILLA'S MOTHER."

After reading the letter, the Doctor slipped it

into his pocket and turned to his wife, saying:

"Let us go in."

He took the baby from her, and silently they walked into the house together.

"I must go, Mother," he again said. "I am late now. The baby must be fed and cared for. I'll be back just as soon as possible."

Once more he kissed her, saying:

"Mother'll be brave, won't she?"

He got his answer from her eyes, as they looked up into his; for she could not utter a word. He understood, however, all that she would say, and hurried out. As he took the reins from Si, he said:

"Better keep still, Si. Say nothing unless I tell you to. You might go in to see if there is anything you can do to help Mrs. Warren. Better stay inside, anyway, Si; she may be nervous."

Si nodded. One word from the Doctor was enough. All who knew him loved him too well not to carry out his wishes, and Si was no exception.

CHAPTER II

THE PICTURE'S BACKGROUND

MARGARET HOLWAY was the only daughter of Nathan Holway, President of the First National Bank in the City of Ripley. The year following her graduation from High School she went to visit her uncle's family in Longhaven; and during that visit, she met for the first time Hunt M. Warren, a young medical student from Boston University, who, for the summer with other college boys, was acting in the capacity of waiter at one of the large hotels in Longhaven.

The friendship there formed ripened in the years to come; and, not long after his own graduation, young Dr. Warren went to Ripley, not on a visit as he had done several times during the past two years, but to claim Margaret Holway for his wife.

Dr. Warren was seven years older than Margaret, and that seven years served well to bind them all the more closely together. They helped him to be not only lover, but elder brother, companion, counselor, guide. He seemed to be everything that was needed to complete her life, making of her an all-round developed type of noble womanhood; but it was not the years alone that did this for her. She loved the man with all her

heart and he loved her; furthermore, the sweet friendship and trust that each heart had in the other bound their lives together in a way that would have tended to bring out the best in each regardless of years.

Margaret Holway's most intimate girl friend from childhood, Mabel Fairbanks, had been bridesmaid at the wedding, and Clifford Illsley, the best man. During the evening many eyes rested on these two friends, and more than one guest remarked that Mabel and Clifford would soon follow in the way that Margaret and the Doctor had led. Something, however, no one seemed to know what, happened. Clifford suddenly left Ripley, and so far as any one knew, left no clew behind him. At first the people were curious, but as time went on, their curiosity ebbed until finally his name was rarely mentioned in the community.

After their marriage, Dr. Warren and his wife settled in the village of Woodrow, and, in spite of her new happiness and the joys of her new home, she never let a week pass without writing to her old friend, Mabel, telling her of the place, the people, and always of the Doctor. When summer came, a letter went containing more than that. It carried a most urgent invitation to her friend to visit them in their new home.

"Couldn't Aunt Peabody come to look out for your mother, and Em and Hallie do the work for just one month?" Margaret wrote.

Mabel longed to go. Although it seemed im-

possible, she read and re-read her friend's letter. She meant to enjoy the thought, if not all that the thought conveyed. Her mother had grown so dependent on her, she scarcely dared suggest such a thing as leaving her for a whole month. The girl slept over it; she dreamed over it; and the next morning, as she brushed and braided her mother's heavy, wavy hair, now more than half gray, she spoke of Margaret's letter, of the invitation, and added:

"But I wouldn't think of leaving you dear, unless you were willing; you know I wouldn't,—besides, we don't even know that Aunt Peabody could come."

"I never thought of her before," said the mother. "She was always handy round, and I know, Mabel, you ought to have the rest; and more than that, the change. It would do you a world of good. How I would like to see Margaret myself! What is this, the middle of June?"

"The 18th, mother."

"Well, you write to Aunt Peabody. We'll see what she says."

"Just as you say. Do you really think I better, mother?" Mabel asked, cautiously, and yet hopefully.

"Of course I do," came the genuine response.

It seemed to Mabel that she had never seen a happier moment. After getting her mother's pillows adjusted, and her chair wheeled up to the window, where its occupant could look out on the

high school tennis court and watch the boys and girls at play, Mabel left her. Before a half hour had passed, she had followed her mother's suggestion and written to "Aunt Peabody," one of those dear old souls who is "Aunt" to everybody and blood relation to nobody.

Anxiously, Mabel waited for her answer. It was three days in reaching her, but to her delight it said, "Yes."

When Mabel had finished reading the welcome epistle to her mother, the latter said:

"I do not know how I shall ever get along without my own sweet nurse, but—if that nurse should get sick, I would be even worse off, so we had better not run the risk. You just go and have the best play time of your life, and the only one you have had for—how long has it been, dear, two years?"

"Two and a half, mother."

"So it has. You see, dear, you have made it so pleasant for me that the time has not seemed so long. Now, isn't that a compliment?"

"The *best compliment I ever had*, mother, dear, and so sweet of you to give it," answered Mabel, as she gave her the morning paper and left a kiss on both her cheeks.

CHAPTER III

MABEL'S VISIT

WOODROW was six miles from the nearest railroad station. When Mabel arrived, Margaret was there, with a neat open-backed buggy and Nell, the Doctor's little bay mare, so dappled and shining that one could almost stand by her side and see his own reflection. Mabel, however, did not care to see hers just then; for she knew very well that her hat was askew, her face specked with coal dust, and her hair topsy-turvy; besides, Margaret was there—her own old Margaret.

When greetings were over, Margaret said:

"The buggy was not big enough to allow three to ride comfortably; and then, Hunt said he knew us well enough to know that we needed to be left alone for a little while to get some of our talk out so he would have a chance to get a word in edgewise."

"He has seen us before, I guess," Mabel laughed back, as she helped tuck a large extension case into the buggy; after which, the two women, so overjoyed at seeing each other, started on.

When about half the distance had been covered, Mabel exclaimed

"And is *this* Woodrow?"

Admiration was wrapped up in each word, and

even in the tone itself. Margaret noticed it, and asked with feeling:

"Do you wonder that I love it?"

"I fear I should not think much of your judgment if you did not love it," Mabel answered. "Look, look at those hills! O, stop the horse, Margaret, please do!"

Margaret drew the reins up tightly, saying as sweetly as to a person, "Whoa, Nellie."

For a moment, Mabel was simply speechless; and then she pointed to the western sky, so gorgeous in its golden glory, so radiant in its pinks and reds and yellows that she wondered what the angels had done. Had they used all the colors in God's rainbow in painting the sky that night, or had they spilled the several shades and God himself taken the restless running mass, and with one stroke of that Master hand made a painting so beautiful that with it no Corot could for one moment compare.

"Margaret! Margaret, do you come here often?" she gasped.

"As often as I wish," was the reply, "or I mean I can come if I choose, but some times I want to go to other places. This is only one of the many, you know."

"Well, we'll go," said Mabel with a sigh and another sweeping glance taking in what seemed to her the most beautiful picture she had ever seen.

Margaret started Nell along, but Mabel, in

spite of their talking kept looking to right and left. She saw such beautiful hills and trees and valleys with here and there little glimpses of the river's sparkling water that it all seemed like a dream to her.

"O, Margaret," she exclaimed at last. "How can you help being happy here?"

"I do not help it, dear. I *am* happy, so tremendously happy that my cup ran over, and I sent for you to help sup it with me lest some of it should go to waste," Margaret replied, as she took the reins in one hand and reached the other over to take one of Mabel's, as she had done hundreds of times in the past.

As they drew near to the village, Mabel said:

"Let me see if I can guess which place is yours. I bet I can," she added, enthusiastically.

"All right. You'll know, though," answered Margaret, laughingly.

"How?"

"Wait—you'll see."

She had scarcely finished speaking when Nell of her own accord pricked up her ears, quickened her pace, and then, gracefully bowing her neck and turning toward the buildings on the right, gave one hearty snort and carried them through the big open doorway into the stable.

Dr. Warren, knowing what Nell would do, was already there to meet them. He lifted Margaret from the carriage and kissed her; and then helped Mabel down.

"Kiss her, too," said Margaret. "She was *my* sister, you know, and now she belongs to both of us."

Thus, the great big hearted boy and manly, true hearted friend kissed Mabel as a brother would have done.

The tired, worn out city girl could never forget the days that followed, during which time she drove with her friends over hill after hill, sometimes over a long, winding roadway, above which the branches on both sides stretched until they met and passed each other with friendly smile, as the soft rays of the sun streamed down through leaf and branch, giving to the passerby a most cordial welcome. This scene ever held a fixed and faithful picture in Mabel's mind; and, during the winter months that followed, she often found herself forming a mental picture of that country road, with its bare trees, the snow-clad fields, and imagined what the ride would be like then, when there was no shade, and no wealth of green on every side. Again, she pictured it after a storm, when each branch and bole bore its weight of fleecy flakes, or glistened and glittered under the rays of a winter's sun.

It was over this same road eight years later that Doctor Warren was called to drive on that morning when our story opens, and it was over this same road, out on a farm, that Mrs. Munson lived, whom the Doctor was called to see when, hidden in his carriage, he found little Willa.

CHAPTER IV

WILLA'S RECEPTION

DR. WARREN, on returning from his visit to Mrs. Munson on that particular morning, found his wife sitting beside the little cradle in which lay their unexpected "gift." That cradle had been in an unused room up stairs since their own baby girl had been taken from them; and, when the Doctor saw it, and saw, too, on a table nearby, a basket filled with tiny clothes, he knew the struggle his wife had undergone since his departure. As she rose to meet him, he folded her in his arms, saying:

"Brave little mother! You have done just right."

To know that her husband approved was happiness to her at any time, and just now his words were especially comforting.

He soon learned that his wife had eaten no breakfast, but had waited for him to join her on his return. The truth is, neither one had much of an appetite. After sipping their coffee, and talking over the problem before them, Dr. Warren took from his pocket the letter and read it aloud to his wife.

"Now, the question," he said calmly, "is what *shall* or *should* we do?"

"It seems more like a dream, Hunt, than any-

thing else. While you were gone, I wondered if I were really awake," answered Mrs. Warren.

"But I don't know whether to open that other letter or not," he said thoughtfully. "The plea of the mother seems to have such a genuine ring in it that to do so seems almost like betraying a trust; besides, it is not mine. It is marked to the child. And yet, if it were a case of deception, it would be right to open it."

"Yes, but how are we to know?" she asked.

"That's the question."

"Let's read the letter again to see if we can find a clue," suggested his wife.

Again the letter was read, and for several moments afterward, both were silent. At last he said:

"Did you find any?"

"No—but isn't it sad?"

"Shall we believe what she has said?" he asked.

"I had rather trust than doubt at any time, hadn't you?" asked his wife.

"Yes, of course; besides, it is only right to have confidence in others till we prove them unworthy of that confidence. We know nothing of this mother; then, until we know that she has lied, it seems to me that we should believe she has told the truth."

"Then shall we keep the child?"

"The mother speaks of 'giving' her to us. If she has, cannot we think of her as ours? We could learn to love her, couldn't we?"

"*Learn* to love her! Why, Hunt, I love her

now."

"So do I, Margaret."

"Let's go in and look at her," said Mrs. Warren.

Together they went into the room where the child lay asleep.

"She has good features, hasn't she?" asked the Doctor.

"Unusually good for a child so young, and a good shaped head, too. Did you notice that?"

"Yes, and if a change of food does not make her sick as it sometimes does, she will be all right."

"The top of her head is bald, but down low in the back is quite a lot of hair, and I think it will be light and curly," Mrs. Warren remarked.

"Probably. Her eyes are blue."

Thus these two loyal souls stood discussing the new arrival from head to foot. If she had been older, and conscious, no doubt her right ear would have burned, for all they said of her was good; as it was, she lay blissfully unconscious of any change in her surroundings.

"But the neighbors, did you think of them?" asked Mrs. Warren.

"Yes; they'll be mighty curious, but what of it? We three are the only ones who know it. Si won't say anything, and we won't. It's no one's business now but ours, so let them wonder."

"But if they ask whose baby she is?"

"We'll say, 'She's ours now.' She is; you know the mother said 'give.'"

"But that won't satisfy them."

"I know it won't, but if we make that answer enough times they will grow tired of asking. I believe they are all true enough friends to us, and have confidence enough in us to know that we would not have her unless there was some good reason for our doing so; as time goes on, they will learn to respect that reason, and to realize that we consider it our own personal property."

"Yes, I think you are right. They would believe anything that you told them. I am not so sure of myself," answered Mrs. Warren.

"Well, I am," replied her husband. "You know they love you."

"No, I don't know it. That's the trouble. I know they like me, but a lot of times I think it is just for your sake. Everybody loves you, but I am not jealous. I should be cross with them if they didn't," replied his wife.

"And I have often thought that they loved me for your sake. Now what do you think of that?"

But Mrs. Warren did not have time to answer; for baby Willa called them in regular baby fashion.

The Doctor lifted her from the cradle and passed her to his wife who had reached out her arms to take her.

Then Willa enjoyed her second breakfast in her new home. Both Dr. and Mrs. Warren watched her as she tugged away at the bottle of milk. Willa evidently enjoyed every drop taken. She worked so hard that the drops of perspiration stood in

drops on her little forehead. At last, when her hunger was relieved, she let the rubber slip from her mouth, and looked around her. In a moment her eyes rested on both her new friends; and when they did, a little smile came to her lips. Although they knew she was not old enough to realize what she was doing, they were glad to see this first indication of a happy disposition.

At that moment, the bell rang. Baby Willa gave a little start, but she did not cry.

Another call had come for the Doctor; and, as he stepped into the carriage, he turned to Si with the words:

"You may as well know, Si, first as last, that we are going to keep the child as the mother requested us to. If anyone asks you whose child she is, simply say that she is ours now. She is. Further than that, you need to *know* nothing. Do you understand?"

"You can trust me, Doctor," answered the faithful helper.

"I know it, Si. If I didn't, I shouldn't have told you this much."

"I am glad you are going to keep her. She'll be a sight o' company for Mrs. Warren," answered Si.

"You had better go in while I am gone as you did before. She may need something."

"Yes, sir," replied Si, who, as soon as the carriage drove away, did as the Doctor had requested and went into the house to see if he could be of

service either to his old or his new mistress.

Si's leaving the stable permitted another scene to be enacted. On a loose scaffold above the spot where he and the Doctor had stood, hidden behind a clump of hay, lay Willa's mother. Breathlessly, she had listened to every word uttered by the two men. Her heart leaped with joy when she heard the earnest, sincere tones of Dr. Warren, and realized that her prayer was answered.

Now, she felt her chance had come. She had feared she might have to stay there all day. Before starting, however, she drew from her pocket a crumpled piece of paper and a pencil. In a few moments she wrote, briefly:

"Dear Dr. and Mrs. Warren:

"Again I trespass on your good nature, but you must understand a mother's love well enough to forgive me when I tell you that I could not leave my baby until I was sure of the verdict. I, therefore, ran the risk of hiding on your scaffold. I have just heard Dr. Warren tell his servant that you are to keep the child. God only knows what those words meant to me. May He bless you always, and may Willa prove a blessing to you both. I shall die now knowing that my little girl is safe.

"WILLA'S MOTHER."

After folding the note, the woman drew from her belt a stout pin with which she fastened the note to a rafter.

As soon as this was done, she came down the rough steps, slipped out through a back door which led to the hen yard, and thence into the field beyond. She had come as if by magic, and she left in the same way,—that is for all anyone in Woodrow knew.

It was not until the next day, however, that Si found the mother's message, and when he did, the words, "By crackers!" came from his lips as before. He at once thought of his other surprise, and connected the two; but, showing more honor than some in his place would have done, he put the note in his pocket unread, awaiting the return of the Doctor. He would have taken the note to Mrs. Warren, but feared it might contain something of a startling nature. The Doctor's constant solicitude for his wife made Si thoughtful, too. The man did not have to wait long, however, for the sound of wheels was soon heard. Si's face told the Doctor at once that something had happened.

"I found this, Doctor, pinned to a rafter in the stable. I thought maybe it might tell something, you know," Si said as he passed up the note.

The Doctor hastily read the message written the day before, after which he walked slowly into the house, and passed the note to his wife.

"What do you think, now?" he asked, as she let the letter fall in her lap.

"I feel surer than ever that she told the truth before," said Mrs. Warren.

"Why?"

"Because she has now proven that she had a real mother's heart by running the risk of being found rather than leave her child to an uncertainty."

"Little philosopher!" exclaimed the Doctor.

Again, they both looked at the child that, for all that knew now, was to grow up as their own, the child that from this time on should be called Willa Warren; in fact, they knew of no other name by which to call her.

CHAPTER V

THE NEIGHBORS

“**L**AND sakes, Mrs. Brown, I do believe Mrs. Warren is never goin’ ter git over the losin’ o’ that little girl of her’n. I’ve heard how that once every so often she goes and gits out all her little clothes and looks at ’em and cries and cries, though she’s always cheerful like when I sees her; but just now as I come past I sees a lot of little clothes out on the line. I s’pose she washes ’em once in a while to keep ’em from yellowin’, don’t you?”

Mrs. Lindsey had “dropped in” to make a call on Mrs. Brown, whose house she had to pass on her way to the store. As Mrs. Lindsey talked, she wiped the drops of perspiration from her face, and then picked up a newspaper that lay in a chair nearby, and began to fan herself.

On the floor at her right sat a four quart basket, made by real Indians who had camped over at one edge of Woodrow the winter before, and in the basket were three dozen fresh eggs which she was taking to the store to exchange for some print, preparatory to lining a new quilt she had just pieced.

Mrs. Brown listened to her neighbor’s discussion of Mrs. Warren, the baby that was dead, and the clothes now on the line. She scarcely knew

what answer to make. She knew very well why those clothes were on the line; she knew of the baby girl now at the Doctor's, and she herself had seen the child. She also knew how much her caller would enjoy having this piece of news to carry with her. No one in the town feasted more on other people's affairs than did Mrs. Lindsey; and, the more exciting the piece of news, the greater her enjoyment of it. She would twist the matter around under her tongue like a sweet morsel that must be thoroughly chewed and mixed with the saliva of her own opinion in order to be thoroughly digested. Sometimes, mental Fletcherizing is good for one, but seldom when practiced on food belonging to one's neighbors. Mrs. Brown, realizing this, resolved that she herself would not be the one to spread the news; and, consequently, replied:

"I do not wonder she feels the loss. I never saw a sweeter child than little Angie."

"Well, I never seen her but onct, and that was at the fun'ral. She looked jist like a little wax doll, then," answered Mrs. Lindsey.

"You see we live nearer than you, and I used to see her often. I think the loss of her has been as big a blow to the Doctor as to his wife," said Mrs. Brown.

"Well, he al'ays did love children. I knew if they ever hed one o' their own, he'd love it to death," replied her caller.

"God knows best, of course; but sometimes,

when I have thought of their case, I could not help thinking of the Jefferson family. They had their eleventh one the same year Angie was born, and all that winter they did not have more than half enough to eat, nor clothes enough to keep them warm, and yet every one of them lived through it. They are always well in spite of their poverty and dirt."

"I know it and that beats me. I'se speakin' to my man 'bout that very thing only yisterday," answered Mrs. Lindsey.

Mrs. Lindsey invariably spoke of her husband, Tom, as "my man." Why she could not say, "my husband," or "Tom," or "Mr. Lindsey," Mrs. Brown could never understand, and while she was thinking of it, her neighbor only emphasized the thought by saying:

"Well, I must be trottin' on, or I won't be home in time to git my man's dinner."

As she went down over the steps of Mrs. Brown's house, the latter said:

"If you will call on your way back, you may fill your basket with apples. They are getting real good for pies and sauce. We have used them for a week, now."

"O, thanks! I'd like ter have some. My man said last night he wished we had an apple tree."

"The wind yesterday took off a lot, and you can have some as well as not."

"Then I'll be in on my way back. Good-by, Mrs. Brown."

The house sat about four rods from the road, and before Mrs. Lindsey had reached the turn, she called back to her neighbor, "There ain't no errand at the store that I kin do fer you, is there?"

"Why, no, I—yes, there is, too. Just a minute," answered Mrs. Brown, who ran into the house and came back with a nickel.

"I do want a spool of number 100 thread, white, and if you will get it, it will save my going down."

"I thought maybe there might be somethin' and it would save you a goin'," replied Mrs. Lindsey.

Mrs. Brown said to herself, as her neighbor went out of the yard:

"An awful good hearted woman, poor soul, but awful newsy. That's her one failing. I'm glad I thought about the apples. They will enjoy them. I wonder what time it is." As she said the last words, she stepped into the dining-room to look at the new clock of which she was very proud. When she found that it was already 10:15, she thought of her bread, and noticed that it was raised, all ready for the oven. She removed the snow white towel with which it was covered, and one by one gently placed the tins within the oven and closed the door. As she folded the towel and laid it on the pantry shelf, she said:

"If that gets baked by the time Mrs. Lindsey comes, I'll give her a loaf. I know it will be good and it will be a change for her and Tom."

Before long, the loaves were baked a golden brown and looked as light as a feather. She had

scarcely placed them on her bread-board and covered with the same white towel when Mrs. Lindsey's step was heard outside.

"Sophia Brown! I never was so s'prised in my life," gasped Mrs. Lindsey.

"Why, what has happened, Mrs. Lindsey? You look scared."

"No, I ain't scared none, but I am dum' founded. Don't you remember when I'se here before, how we were talking 'bout Mrs. Warren an' the baby clothes?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've jist found out there's a real live baby there—a real one."

"What, company?" asked Mrs. Brown, with not a note in her voice which could possibly tell Mrs. Lindsey that she was not hearing something for the first time.

"Company? No, but a baby is there, so Mrs. Little jist told me when I was in her store; and she says her boy, Jim, seen it when he was up there last night. He said, 'Why, Mrs. Warren, whose baby yer got?' and she said, 'She's ours now,' and then when he comes out, he asked Si the same thing, and Si made him the same answer. Nobody knows where it came from, nor whose it is, nor how long it's goin' to stay, nor nothin'. Did yer ever hear the likes o' that?" asked Mrs. Lindsey, as she stopped to get breath.

"Is it a boy or girl?" inquired Mrs. Brown, innocently.

"A girl, so Jim said."

"Maybe they've adopted it."

"Maybe, but, my land! There ain't been no babies round town here only what belonged to folks, and we know every one of them anyhow, so where did she come from?" asked Mrs. Lindsey, who acted as though she could not rest until the mystery was solved.

"She must be like Topsy, just 'grew,' " laughed Mrs. Brown.

"I guess she must. Mrs. Little said she was goin' up herself this afternoon ter see it. Jim said Mrs. Warren sat there holdin' it jist like it was Angie."

"I am glad if she has one. She will take a lot of comfort with her."

"Yes, that's right. But where did she come from? That's what puzzles me," and Mrs. Lindsey reached into her pocket for her handkerchief, where she found the spool of thread that she had bought for Mrs. Brown.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed. "I most forgot yer thread; and that makes me think. Mrs. Little said, when she found out I was gittin' print to line my quilt, that she thought I ought ter hev a quiltin' and hev a lot o' the women come in ter help me. She thought Thursday would be a good time. Could you come then?"

"Thursday? Yes, I think I could," answered Mrs. Brown slowly; for, she was revolving in her mind the reason for Mrs. Little's having suggested

this quilting, and could not help thinking it might be for the sake of getting a lot of the neighbors together to see what could be learned about the new comer to town. However, she knew that feeling must be given vent to at some time, and perhaps the sooner the better. At any rate, she would be there, and perhaps might act in the capacity of a bridle to the tongues of some of her neighbors.

"Well, then, had I better git word to the different ones? Do you think they'll come?" asked Mrs. Lindsey.

"Why, of course, they will come if they can."

"Then I'll call an' see Mrs. Perkins, and Miss Bolster, and when my man comes up fer the mail to-night, he kin see a lot more. I must hurry. It must be after eleven, ain't it?"

"About half past, I think. But you want your apples. You can fill your basket out of that pail, and just wait a minute," said Mrs. Brown, kindly.

She went into the pantry and soon reappeared with a loaf of her newly baked bread, neatly wrapped in a clean, fresh paper.

"I thought maybe you and Mr. Lindsey would like to sample some of my new bread for your dinner. It's all warm."

"Well, now, Mrs. Brown, if you don't beat everything I ever see. Now you ain't robbin' yourself, be yer?"

"No, indeed. I baked four. I hope it will be good."

"Good! No one ever seen you bake none that

wa'n't good," answered Mrs. Lindsey, little realizing what a doubtful compliment she was paying her neighbor.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUILTING

WHEN Thursday came, Mrs. Brown went to the quilting, not so much because she really wished to go, but because Woodrow was Woodrow, neighbors were neighbors, and she would not think of extending such a slight to one as not to accept an invitation to such a gathering; besides, she felt she might be needed.

The nine women present all lived within a radius of two miles, and near enough to the village of Woodrow to know the happenings there. When Mrs. Brown arrived, the quilt was in the frame and spread full size in the Lindsey sitting-room, or parlor, whichever one prefers to call it; for it served for both, in fact was the only large room in the house except the kitchen. As she entered this room, she heard the words, "very mysterious," and at once guessed the topic under discussion. Having prepared herself for whatever might come, she began to discuss the quilt, some of the pieces in it which she recognized as coming from a dress belonging to Grandma Lindsey, or Mrs. Tom Lindsey; she also found various patterns that had once been hers, as several months ago she had given her neighbor a lot of pieces. In a few minutes she was telling them about the first quilting she ever at-

tended, and relating some of the funny things that happened there. This encouraged those present to follow her example. Others arrived, and all this time only general conversation was enjoyed. About the middle of the afternoon, Mrs. Brown was silently congratulating them on their good behaviour, and thinking that perhaps she had misjudged her neighbors after all, when she heard the sound of wheels; and, looking out, saw Dr. Warren drive by.

"I suppose you all know about the baby, don't you?" asked Mrs. Little.

"Yes," and "No," came at once, the latter in tones of great astonishment.

"Why, what baby?" came from those who had answered in the negative.

"You haven't heard about the baby they have there?" she asked.

"Who has there? What do you mean?" asked Susan Greely and Hannah Bolster in the same breath.

"Dr. and Mrs. Warren, of course."

"But hers died," replied Susan, "and I didn't know she was—"

"She wasn't, but this has just *come*," answered Mrs. Little.

"Come from where?" continued the other.

"That's what we don't know, but there's the baby. I seen her myself last night," replied Mrs. Little.

"For the land sakes! How big is she?" asked

Mrs. Plummer.

"O, 'bout two, or three months, wouldn't you think so Mrs. Brown, or ain't you seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her, and she is a dear, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's a lovely baby, but that don't tell us where she came from, as I see," answered the much concerned Mrs. Little.

"P'r'aps some o' their poor relations died an' left the baby. Prob'ly they've got poor relations like all the rest o' us," suggested Susan.

"I shouldn't wonder, and maybe that's why they don't want ter talk about it for fear we'll find out it came from a poor family," said Mrs. Lindsey in a tone of satisfaction, as though the mystery was solved.

"I don't think that would make any difference with the Doctor and I don't know as it would with his wife. They never was no kind of stuck-up folks, you know, not even when they first came here," remarked Grammie Beals.

"That's right. You never see them looking down on nobody, do you?" came from another.

"Well, what do you think, Mrs. Brown? You live nearer than any the rest of us. Do you think it's some relation of theirs, or did they send to some orphan home or somethin' of that sort for one to adopt where their'n died?" asked Mrs. Little.

"I am sure I could not tell you because I do not know," replied Mrs. Brown; and then, seriously

but kindly, she added, "to tell the truth, I think I had just as soon not know until they get ready to tell me. If ever I knew a true gentleman and lady, they are Dr. and Mrs. Warren; and I have a pretty good chance to know them, too. Mrs. Warren simply said, 'She's ours now,' and knowing her as well as I do, I knew she had some good, solid reason for not saying more, because she always speaks very freely to me. Consequently, until she gets ready to tell me that reason, I shall consider that it belongs to her, not to me. More than that, to tell the truth, I do not feel that it is any of my business. I just know there is some good reason for their having her, and I can't be thankful enough that she is there. She will do more for Mrs. Warren than all the medicine in the world."

"I'm glad, too," said Mrs. Little in a very different tone from what she had used before.

Mrs. Brown at once noticed the change, and apparently all the others did also, for in another moment the subject was changed and not referred to again the whole afternoon.

It certainly seemed that Mrs. Brown's words had gone home to the heart of each one there, and it seemed so afterwards, too; for, from that time on, the spirit shown by her seemed to pervade all Woodrow, until one and all took for granted the right of Dr. and Mrs. Warren to the possession of Willa.

CHAPTER VII

CHARACTER REVEALED

MRS. BROWN is no longer the nearest neighbor of Dr. and Mrs. Warren. Si Campbell, who for several years had been like one of the Warren family, so much did he think of them and they of him, decided that he would prefer a home of his own; and, as Hannah Bolster was not averse to changing her name to Hannah Campbell, plans for the wedding were accordingly made.

The Doctor's house sat on the edge of his ten acre lot and next to the village of Woodrow. As he felt that he could not easily replace Si, he and his wife agreed that Si better put up a neat little house on the lower side of their own lot. This plan was carried out and the house built during the summer that Willa was three years old. All through those months, Willa's chief delight was to visit the new house, and to play with the long, curly shavings which seemed to be everywhere. She was not allowed to go unless Mrs. Warren, the Doctor, or Si went with her, but with three people to act as escort Willa found many opportunities for visiting this scene of delight. Nothing seemed to escape her attention; she even grew to feel that the workmen could scarcely get along without her; she had to have her little hammer and shingle nails,

and one corner of the place was called hers.

Day after day, if Si were there, Willa would spend hours picking up and playing with the "tunnin' 'ittle pieces," as she called the various bits of trimmings which came off and were scattered about.

There was scarcely a day when the Doctor did not go down to see how the men were getting along, and one day in particular when the plastering was done and the finish being put on, the Doctor started for the new house and Willa went with him. The long work-bench was in one of the rooms; shavings of every description were scattered in heaps around the floor, and Willa was soon in their midst. As the Doctor and the workmen started for the next room to look around, the former noticing that one of the men had left his knife lying open on the bench, turned to Willa, saying:

"Don't touch the knife, Willa."

"No," said the little voice that had grown so dear to them, but the injunction given simply served as a suggestion to the active little mind, which before that time had not been conscious of the knife's presence. The men had no more than gotten out of sight when, childlike, Willa left her shavings and went to inspect the forbidden knife. The "don't" of the Doctor was at once forgotten; and, wholly unconscious for the time that she was disobeying, the child picked up the knife so bright and shining, turning it first this way and that, until suddenly the blade went into the soft baby flesh

on one of her little thumbs. It did not go deep, but deep enough to bring Willa to her senses. Although it hurt, no cry came from her. She carefully replaced the knife but that was much easier than replacing her peace of mind; for, never before had she deliberately disobeyed the Doctor, whom she loved better than anyone else in all the world. She loved Mrs. Warren dearly, but she almost revered her "papa." Never had there been a jar between them. It was enough for her at any time to know that "papa wants baby do this," or "not do this," as the case might be.

As she saw a few drops of blood coming from the cut, the tears came to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, although no sound accompanied them. It being her left thumb that was cut, she reached with her right hand into her apron pocket, and drew out her Christmas handkerchief, which had a colored border consisting of dogs's and children's heads, and which to Willa seemed very beautiful indeed. She wrapped her wounded thumb in this, after which she tucked the thumb into the palm of her hand, and shut her four fat fingers over it. When the Doctor and the workmen returned, Willa's gaiety was gone. However, the men and he were so taken up with plans for the house that no one noticed the change in the little lady's mood. The Doctor started home and Willa followed. As pieces of boards, stones, and other debris had to be climbed over, the Doctor reached to take Willa by the hand lest she fall; but, quick as a flash,

Willa leaped to the other side and slipped her right hand into his. Thinking she was unusually quiet for her, the big man said kindly:

“Didn’t Papa stay long enough, or didn’t Willa have a good time?”

There was no answer from Willa. She dared not trust herself to speak. A great lump was in her throat, and try as she would, she could not swallow it.

She was bareheaded, and with no hat to shade her face, the Doctor had a better chance to study her expression; and, knowing her as he did, he was sure that something was troubling her. From babyhood, he had sought to have her confidence, and he had always succeeded. He must not fail now. Suddenly, he saw the tears trickling down her cheeks, and he tried again:

“Willa isn’t sick, is she?”

A shake of her head was her only answer. The tender tone, however, of the Doctor made it harder and harder to hold in. They were nearly to their own house, and the Doctor, knowing that, whatever the trouble might be, he would more quickly learn the nature of it if they were alone, directed their steps toward the summer house where were rocking chairs and Willa’s swing. One of her chief delights was to have her papa sit in her swing while she pushed it, and he thought possibly by having a little play with her, she might become herself once more. They were just climbing the steps of this shady retreat when Willa broke

down and cried as though her heart would break.

He took her in his arms and sat down in one of the easy chairs. With her right hand she took the bottom of her apron to wipe the tears away, but they came so thick and fast that finally the Doctor had to take his own handkerchief. Tenderly he dried the face and kissed her little forehead, saying:

"Isn't Willa going to tell papa what the trouble is? Willa knows papa loves her, doesn't she?"

For several minutes, heavy sobs were his only answer; and then, cuddling up close to him and throwing both arms around his neck, she burst out:

"Willa naughty," and, as though fearful lest the realization of this might separate them, she drew her arms tighter and tighter about his neck and tucked her own face up close to his.

The Doctor was a man of sufficient thought and sense to realize what those two words had cost Willa; and to realize, too, that no harder battle is fought by men and women to-day than the one which had just been fought by this little girl, and he felt that she had come off victorious.

Never had he been so proud of her, and never had he appreciated her true worth more than at that moment. He drew his strong arms closer about her, and said in his tenderest tones:

"Tell papa about it. Papa never scolds you, does he?"

A shake of her head was all the answer she could make, and a sigh which shook her whole

frame accompanied that.

"Then sit down on papa's knee and tell him all about it, won't you?"

This time she nodded and another sigh came.

"That's a little lady," he said, encouragingly, and he could see that she was slowly getting control of herself.

Taking her from his shoulder, he placed her on his knee and folded his arms about her. After waiting a few moments, he said:

"Willa ready now? What was Willa naughty about?"

"De knife. Papa told baby not tate it. Baby toot it. Baby tut fum," and she held it up for his inspection.

The Doctor could scarcely keep from smiling when he saw how Willa had shielded it, and yet he showed no signs of amusement for he knew that this was a serious time in Willa's little life, and one which might teach her many lessons in days to come.

"And baby feels sorry?" he asked, kindly.

Willa nodded, her lips trembled, and she winked hard and fast to keep the tears back.

"If Willa hadn't touched the knife, the knife wouldn't have cut, would it?"

She shook her head.

"Then if Willa had minded papa, she wouldn't have been hurt, would she?"

Another shake of her head came.

"Willa knows now that she ought to have mind-

ed, doesn't she?"

This time a nod came as his answer.

"And she is sorry now and wants to be good?"

Another nod followed.

"Well papa is very, very sorry that little Willa was naughty, but he is so pleased to think that she has told him all about it like a little lady that he isn't going to scold her or punish her at all this time, but if she hadn't told papa and he had found out about it, he would have had to punish her because she didn't mind him. Do you understand?"

This time a faint "yes" accompanied the nod.

"Then your being sorry, and not being naughty any more, makes papa forgive you, and is going to mend everything, isn't it?"

"And mate papa 'uv me den?" she asked, hopefully.

"Papa always loves you, darling. And you will always come to papa and tell him everything?"

"Yes," and as though to bind the contract all the more firmly, she tucked her little fat hand into his big palm and left it there.

Thus ended a scene which neither Willa nor the Doctor ever forgot, a scene that bound their hearts more closely together than ever before.

On going into the house, neither spoke of what had happened, but that night after Willa had knelt by Mrs. Warren's knee and said that blessed, childish prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep," and finished by saying, "Dod b'ess papa; Dod b'ess mama; Dod b'ess baby; Dod b'ess ebbybody,

amen;" had given them each a good-night kiss, climbed into her little bed and gone to Dreamland, the Doctor told his wife all about their afternoon's experience, adding:

"I'm almost glad she did it, because it proves to us the true nature of the child and that she is one in a hundred. One seldom sees a child who, of her own free will, would have made such a confession after deliberately disobeying."

"I think it was one of the noblest things I ever knew a child to do. It is hard for even grown people to do that," answered his wife.

"I think this ought to convince anyone that she is true blue, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, but there is no one to convince but us, and we were convinced long ago, weren't we?"

"I know, but it is gratifying even then to see the fact emphasized from time to time as she grows older."

The two were sitting in one corner of the porch as they talked, and to the relief of both, no call came for the Doctor, and they had the whole evening together. This was, indeed a treat to both; for no two hearts were ever more united in everything than those two, and the little stranger who had joined them, although she had wedged her way into the heart of each, only served to cement their own all the more closely together.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DELAYED VACATION

THE following summer Dr. Warren felt certain that his wife needed a change and rest; more especially because, heretofore, she had flatly refused to go anywhere, even to her old home in Ripley unless he could go, too. Arrangements were accordingly made for them to leave. Without much difficulty, he succeeded in getting a substitute, for the time being,—a young Harvard graduate who was only too glad to come, both for the sake of the practice and for the sake of a start financially, because he was well aware of the fact that for the past few years money had been constantly going out, and only a very little or none coming in.

The young man, Henry V. Livermore, was to come to Woodrow three days prior to the Doctor's leaving, during which time he was to become acquainted with the present patients, which for a few weeks might come under his care.

Plans were made for Hannah and Si to go up to the Doctor's to stay during this time, thus giving the young man a home and an opportunity to use Dr. Warren's office and study. When the looked for day came, no one was more concerned than Willa. To her, as to any child of four years, the trip meant more than a trip to Europe would

mean to an adult. In spite of her happiness, however, her lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears as she said "good-by" to Hannah and Si, who to her seemed a part of their own family.

During that forenoon, Hannah certainly found enough to keep her busy. There was picking up and straightening around to do in every room, there was a pie to be made, and dinner to get.

Dr. Livermore did not return at once from the postoffice.

"Probably he's staying round talking to folks, trying to get acquainted," said Hannah to herself as she bustled about from one room to another; in fact, all over the place from parlor to stable. The truth is, Hannah missed each one of the three.

"Seems like there'd been a funeral," she said to Si, when she passed him in the shed where he was piling up tier after tier of winter's wood.

"Bless the dear! Look a' that," said Hannah, holding up to Si's view the little washboard which he himself, by making grooves in a thin, smooth piece of hard wood and putting on a neat frame, had made for Willa. This rested in a keeler where the child had left it the day before when she was helping, as she thought, to wash. It was an expected thing when washday came for Willa to wash, too, and no child to-day gets more pleasure with a toy piano or a Teddy bear than Willa got with her little tub and home-made washboard.

Not a single day passed when some similar incident did not take place which brought Willa fresh

in the minds of her loyal friends. Even Dr. Livermore had become attached to the child in the few days he had known her; and, day after day he had studied the picture of her that was on Dr. Warren's desk. Something about the face had attracted him, held him; but he simply thought that she was an exceptionally interesting, precocious child. The thought that she was not the own child of Dr. and Mrs. Warren never came to him, and there was no reason why it should, as no one had even hinted at such a thing.

One day when the family had been gone over a week, he came in from making a call on one of the village patients; he had been caught in a heavy shower and his feet were wet. After going to his room and changing shoes and stockings, he came back to the study and sat down to read up more thoroughly the diagnosis, when Hannah came out of Willa's room exclaiming:

"Well, I never! You just come here, Doctor, and look a' that."

The young Doctor followed. At first he did not see anything to attract his attention, but Hannah continued:

"Even the cat misses her. You look at that bed, now. I had it all made up nice and smooth, and now look at it. Every mornin' that cat comes in this room to see if Willa is up, and if she ain't, he jumps up there an' they have a play together. **Just** see those tracks!" and Hannah pointed to the dents in the white spread where each paw had gone as

the cat had made his way diagonally across the bed, and then at the head had disarranged the sham as a result of his search for Willa.

"If that isn't cunning! See how he misses her. He is the most stupid cat with other folks and they wouldn't keep him if it wan't for Willa, but she can do anything with him. Many a time I've seen her wheel him back and forth across the kitchen in her little doll cart, and he'd stick out his paws and play with the spokes in the wheels just as happy as could be; and, goodness! One o' us couldn't ha' kept him there while we's saying 'scat!' "

By the time Dr. Livermore got back to the study, his mind had gone from the subject of diagnoses, and he sat gazing at Willa's picture. All at once he started, sat bolt upright, and then leaned over to take the picture in his hand. He turned it first one way and then another. At last, he said to himself:

"I've solved the mystery. I have tried ever since I have been here to make up my mind where I had seen a face that Willa's reminded me of, but now I know. It's the picture that father has of Aunt Emily taken when she was a child. The expression around the eyes and mouth are just the same. By George, it is! I wish I had it here. Father wouldn't let it out of the house, though, for love nor money. He blames himself and always will. Wouldn't it be strange if the Warren's were some relation to our family and we never knew it; but, Mrs. Warren isn't, for we know of her fam-

ily in Ripley. I wonder where the Doctor came from. I must ask Mrs. Campbell," and he hurriedly rose to go to the kitchen where she was at work when he heard one of the neighbors come in. He turned on his heel, his hands in his pockets, and paced the floor back and forth several times. Suddenly, his eyes lighted on a well worn Bible, and he remembered seeing family records in some old Bibles and wondered if there was one in this. He opened it anxiously, and found it to be one belonging to the Warren family. In it were entered several names, but the record stopped with the death of the Doctor's father, fifteen years before. Not even the Doctor's marriage was entered. He carefully read and re-read the names but none of them was in any way connected with his own family history. He reluctantly closed the book, feeling that the matter was settled. What had seemed like a clew was only a coincident, after all. Not a day passed after that when he did not think of the resemblance between the two faces, but he never spoke of it. He had grown so accustomed to keeping silent about their family trouble that it had now become second nature to him. Nevertheless, he again and again wished that he might compare the two pictures to see if the resemblance were real or simply a creation of his own imagination.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE OLD HOME

“**N**OW, Mrs. Holway, you will let them come, won't you?”

The speaker was Mabel Fairbanks, the old school friend of Mrs. Warren's, who first visited Woodrow the summer following Margaret's marriage. She was now pleading for the Doctor, Margaret and Willa to go over to their house to supper.

So many friends did Margaret have who had not seen her since her marriage that Mrs. Holway was beginning to grow worried lest her daughter's stay at home might in reality be shorter than they had anticipated. True, she and Mr. Holway had visited her several times at Christmas, and twice had they been at Woodrow during the summer, but not once before had Margaret been home since the day of her marriage. She had refused to come without the Doctor, and never before had he really felt that he could leave. As it was, he did so now wholly on her account; but, free again, he was enjoying the respite from work as much as his wife.

At the time of Mabel's call, the Doctor and Willa had gone for a ride with Mr. Holway, who with his wife knew the secret of this little family—knew that Willa was not their own grandchild. More than one neighbor exclaimed:

"How much she looks like her mother!"

Her light hair and blue eyes naturally made everybody feel that she did resemble Mrs. Warren instead of the Doctor, who had dark hair and eyes, and clear, dark skin.

But whether there is resemblance or not, what child ever grew up without being told that he or she looked like father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, uncles or aunts, even unto the third and fourth generations? It is so easy, when some comment is felt necessary, to say: "She does look so much like ———. I always thought a lot of ———. We were the best of friends," and then to sit back congratulating oneself on having said something very clever and courteous. Many, indeed, are the doubtful compliments heaped on the innocents of every age. However, in the case of Mrs. Warren and Willa, each might consider that a compliment had been paid her.

By the time Mabel left the Holway home, she had gained the consent of Mrs. Holway, who finally said:

"I know, dear, it is lovely in you to have them, and they will enjoy every minute; but truly, Mabel, I am afraid it is too much for you. You have so much to do all the time."

"O, don't you think of that! Besides, Hallie is turning into a real housekeeper. She has done a good part of the cooking ever since she graduated. We were speaking of Em last night. She will be so disappointed not to see Margaret!"

"I have been worrying about Em," said Mrs. Holway, kindly. "I am afraid she will get all tired out this summer, and not feel rested for her year's work."

"I know," answered Mabel, regretfully. "We all felt her year's teaching was enough; but, you know those people and that they pay well for tutoring. She just couldn't resist."

"If she can only stand it, it will be all right, but I have feared it was too much," replied Mrs. Holway, in her motherly way.

"When we say a word, she only laughs, and says she is of age now so we can't make her mind. Hallie was bound to do something to help, but Uncle Dick just put his foot down. You know Uncle Dick. What he says has to go, and he stuck to it that she must stay home to help me for a while."

Margaret and her mother accompanied Mabel to the gate, where Mrs. Holway stopped to pick a rose just bloomed for Mabel to carry to her mother. The three then parted, Mabel having Margaret's promise that they would visit her that evening.

The first day after her arrival, Margaret had gone to see Mrs. Fairbanks, who was so changed that only her eyes looked natural, and even they seemed larger, so thin and wasted had she grown. As Margaret had looked at her lying partially bolstered up in her wheel chair, her wavy hair a mass of silver about her radiant face, she felt, as she told her mother afterward, that there was something angelic about her.

"But hasn't their uncle been one man in a hundred!" exclaimed Margaret, when they were alone together.

"One in a thousand, I should say; but if you had known Dick Tenny as a boy you would never wonder at his becoming the man that he has," answered Mrs. Holway.

"And to think that they don't even know whether Mr. Fairbanks is dead or alive!" said Margaret with a shudder.

"I know it. It's no wonder Mrs. Fairbanks is where she is," answered her mother.

The two were still talking when they heard the sound of wheels and a whoop of delight from Willa as the carriage came into the yard. Looking out, Margaret saw not only her father, the doctor, and Willa, but a strange little girl about ten years of age.

"'Trawberries, Gamma! 'Trawberries, Mama! See!" cried Willa, holding up for their inspection a three quart pail of field berries.

The Doctor jumped out, lifted from the buggy first Willa, and then the little girl who said her name was Jennie Jordan, and who was on her way to sell the berries, when the three had overtaken her.

The two children followed Mrs. Holway and Margaret into the house; and, before Mrs. Holway could set the pail of berries on the table, Willa was teasing for a cookie. Jennie was also treated and then led by Willa to grandma's sewing room,

in one corner of which was a box of playthings; and there, the two children entertained themselves while Mrs. Holway turned the berries out on a large platter, washed the pail and packed it with cookies, candy, and peanuts, crowning all with a generous piece of chocolate cake.

"What time is it?" asked Jennie, anxiously, on being told that her pail was ready, but that she might play longer if she wished.

"Just quarter of eleven," answered Mrs. Holway, kindly.

"Then I must go, 'cause I've got to go to the store for mama," answered Jennie, taking a longing look at the box of toys.

She did not know then of the surprise awaiting her in the little tin pail. She only knew that she was in what seemed Fairyland, indeed; but she was no more loath to leave than Willa was to have her go. When Willa was told that Jennie had two brothers and four sisters, she exclaimed:

"G'acious! If I had one ev'y, ev'y day, I's be sat'sfied and fink I's 'ich."

Thus, each child in her own little way was envying the other.

CHAPTER X

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

THAT same evening, between eight and nine o'clock, Mr. and Mrs. Holway were sitting on their back porch, where they had gone earlier in the evening to enjoy the glorious sunset, when they heard the sound of voices and Willa's childish prattle. The Doctor and his wife had been obliged to make their visit shorter than it otherwise would have been on the child's account; for Willa was not in the habit of sitting up late, and had been allowed to go only for the sake of Mrs. Fairbanks, who insisted on having the child come as well as her father and mother. For so many years the two families had stood on friendly terms that ceremony could at all times be laid aside, and thus it was to-night.

After Willa had gone on a mission, giving each one a good-night kiss, she went inside with her mother and was soon in her little bed. Before she would let her mother leave, however, she made her promise to send her papa in, "jes' a minute, mama," she pleaded.

Mrs. Warren, accordingly, delivered the message to her husband, who, as soon as he and the others had finished the topic under discussion, rose and went to Willa's room.

As he leaned over the bed, the child sat up,

clasped both arms about his neck, gave him a kiss on each cheek, and then in a whisper said:

"Papa, when's Kismas?"

"O, Christmas won't be for a long, long time. What has put that in your head?"

"'Cause, I was finking o' sumfin' I wanted," she answered.

It was dark and Willa could not see the smile that hovered around the Doctor's mouth.

"Why, what does Willa want?" he asked, soberly.

"You know Jennie—the girl Gampa bought berries of?"

"Yes,"

"Well, she said dis mornin' dat she had free, four, ten, I guess, bruzzers and sissers, an' I fought maybe, 'fore we went home, you'd buy Willa one."

For a full minute the Doctor was silent. He felt the touch of the childish cheek against his, and felt her anxious breathing. He knew with what longing she waited for his answer to the question that seemed so reasonable to her, but in reality was so impossible.

"Willa, dear," he said tenderly and slowly, "you know papa always tells you the truth, doesn't he?"

"Yes, papa," she answered.

"Well, don't you know how much papa and ma-ma love you?"

"Yes."

"And they wouldn't think of selling you if they

were offered all the money in the world, would they?"

"N-o," she answered, thoughtfully.

"Well, that little girl's papa and mama love her, don't they?"

"Yes."

"And they would love her brothers and sisters just the same, wouldn't they?"

"Yes."

"Then we couldn't expect them to sell one of them, could we?"

"But, papa, I fot dey is so many, and dey is poor, 'cause she was selling berries to det money, an' maybe dey'd sell a bruzzer or sisser, 'cause I haven't any, you know."

"I know, dear, but ——"

"But, papa, will you jest *ast* dem when we det berries, den?" urged Willa.

"Yes, papa will ask them, but he knows they will say 'no.' "

"But you will *ast* dem, won't you?"

"Yes, when I see them again, I will ask them."

"I knew you would, 'cause you don't b'ame Willa for wanting a bruzzer or sisser, do you?"

"No, dear, papa doesn't blame you. Now you will lie down and go to sleep, won't you?"

"Yes. Dood night, an' fank you, papa."

"Good night, precious," said the Doctor, as he lay the child down on the pillow and left a kiss on her lips and another on her forehead.

Willa was soon in Dreamland, and little knew

the heartache which her childish words had caused him, but which in reality made him love her all the more; for they went to prove that she was a normal child with natural childish longings.

The big-hearted man decided not to tell his wife, for she would only remember their loss of the past, which would cause a cloud to pass over her sky that was just now so serene and clear. Instead, he joined the group on the piazza, and was soon having a part in the conversation.

"What do you think of Mrs. Fairbanks, Hunt?" asked Mrs. Holway.

"She looks to me as though she was partly in the other world, already, and was simply keeping her hold on this one by a thread so slender that it might break at any moment."

"She can't last long, can she?"

"I should not be surprised if they should walk in now to say that she was dead," he answered.

"That is just the way I have felt for days," said Mrs. Holway. "I do not like to say anything to Mabel, for it would only worry her; and it has been coming on so gradually that I do not think she notices it so much as we."

"She can't, for she and Hallie were so happy, to-night," said Margaret.

"If it had not been for that happy disposition, Mabel would never have held up as she has," replied her mother.

"What did Willa want?" asked Margaret, turning to her husband.

"O, she wanted to know when 'Kismas' was coming," laughed the Doctor.

"Anything for an excuse to get one of us to stay with her a little longer. I guess it was that more than anything else," said his wife, and the Doctor did not tell her the difference.

CHAPTER XI

THE VISITOR

THE next morning, Margaret had just dressed Willa, and the Doctor was lacing her shoes, when the child who sat facing the window, cried emphatically, "Here's Auntie Mabel!"

Mabel, who had gone to the kitchen door, started to open the screen, but finding it hasped, rapped just as Margaret appeared to greet her. One look at her face, blanched and drawn, so frightened Mrs. Warren that she could not even say, "Good morning."

"Where's Hunt?" Mabel gasped, "and Mr. Holway?"

"In the sitting-room. Why, what's happened, Mabel?" said Margaret.

"May I see them alone?" the other asked.

"Of course. Come in," replied the other, as she led the way to the room where her husband and father sat.

Willa had followed to the door, and now stood clinging to her mother's hand. She had expected a romp, as she was wont to have with "Auntie Mabel," but this Mabel she did not know, and not a word came from her.

The fears which the Doctor had expressed the evening before had partially prepared Mrs. Hol-

way and Margaret for whatever the shock might be, but both returned to the kitchen and left Mabel alone with the two as requested.

The moment the Doctor looked at her, he thought he knew what had happened. No tear was to be seen; no tremble of her voice was detected as she spoke.

"My story is long, but let me tell it," she said. "Don't ask any questions until I am through," she went on.

Both men nodded, and she continued:

"I have come here because you all are among the best friends we have in the world. I didn't tell Margaret because I couldn't; besides, I thought you might break the news more gently."

Both men looked at her in astonishment. Both felt certain that her mother must be dead, but why didn't she say so? They waited anxiously while the girl paused to take breath, after which she went on in the same even tone as before:

"Last night we went to bed as usual, and we heard no disturbance through the night. This morning I was awakened by the birds in the trees near my window. Remembering how much I had to do to-day, I was glad to have waked early, and I dressed as quickly as possible. The first thing on going to the kitchen I always open the door to let in the fresh morning air, and this morning when I opened it, I saw a man's form lying there, face downward, as if asleep. It gave me a dreadful start and I ran back to wake Hallie. He seemed

to be sleeping so soundly that we tiptoed out to look at him, and ——” here she stopped, covering her face with her hands, before she could say, “and—it—was—father.”

“Your father!” exclaimed Mr. Holway, jumping from his chair and forgetting for a moment her request in the beginning.

“Yes, and—he—was—dead.”

She paused again, swallowed several times, and several times opened her mouth as if to speak, but for moments it seemed as though no word would come.

“We waited for the milkman to come along,” she at last said, “and he helped us to take him inside. Mother heard the commotion and asked us what it was, and what we were up so early for. We tried to put her off, but of course we had to have the undertaker, and she saw him pass the door. Before we had time to realize anything, she, who hasn’t walked alone for so many years, went straight to that room, and there she saw—father. We all stood there almost paralyzed. She went up close to him and took one long look; the word ‘Henry’ came in a whisper, and then she fainted. We called the doctor at once, but—she’s—gone,—too.”

“Mabel!” gasped the two men, as they stepped to her chair and laid their hands on each of her shoulders. Their hearts were so full of pity that they could not say another word.

For several minutes she sat there, her head

buried in her hands, and when she raised it, she saw tears in the eyes of both her listeners. She rose to go. The blank, dazed look was still on her face.

"I'll go with you," said the Doctor.

"No, you wait and tell Margaret. Tell it easy," and in another second she was gone. Down over the walk she sped, and the two men with hearts so full of sympathy felt for a moment perfectly helpless before this sorrow.

At last, the Doctor said, "Hadn't we better tell them now?"

"They may as well know it one time as another, and they must be somewhat prepared by seeing her come in in this way, with that look on her face," answered Mr. Holway.

"Is Willa there?" asked the Doctor, opening the door to the kitchen.

"No, she is out feeding the pigeons. What is it, Hunt?" asked his wife.

He told the sad story which had more interruptions this time than it had had during the previous telling. When he had finished, the Doctor said:

"Mabel is in danger. I must go over at once. I'll see if I can persuade her to take something for her nerves. A good cry would do her more good than anything else."

"I'll go, too," said Margaret. "Mother'll look out for Willa."

"You wait a little while. Let me go first, and

then I will come back for you," said the Doctor, tenderly.

"Yes, you better, Margaret," urged the mother.

The Doctor at once hurried away. At the Fairbanks home, he found Dr. Channing, the undertaker, his assistant, and Mrs. Fleming, who worked out by the day, and for whom their family doctor had urged Mabel to send.

Several minutes passed before Dr. Warren saw either Mabel or Hallie. From the undertaker he learned that the father had come home a mere tramp, and evidently had exerted all his strength in reaching the home of his family—not the original Fairbanks home, but where the family had lived since reverses came upon them. No money, no papers were found on his body to give the family the least clue as to the story of his life during his long absence. In one pocket was a pipe, which was partly filled with ashes, but no fresh tobacco was found. In an inner pocket on his shirt was a much soiled picture of Mrs. Fairbanks taken before they were married. Some twine, three or four nails and a few buttons constituted the all with which he had returned. Judging from the appearance of his shoes, the man had walked a long distance. No doubt, overcome by fatigue and hunger, he could not stand the shock he had felt in nearing the home of the family which, years before, he had so cruelly forsaken.

As Dr. Warren left the room, he encountered Mabel and Hallie who had just come down the

stairs. Hallie's eyes were red and swollen, but Mabel, as before, was calm, too calm for her own good.

"Girls, I want to speak to you a minute," said the Doctor.

The two halted, looking straight at him.

"I want you both to feel," he went on, "that each one of us is at your service. You know there is nothing in our power that we would not do to help you, and please ask me to do anything that you would ask an own brother to do."

"Thank you; we trust you. Perhaps you will look after the telegrams," suggested Mabel.

"Anything. Let's sit down here and you give me the names," answered the Doctor.

The three sat down by the dining-room table while name after name was written.

"I have been wondering," said Mabel, "if James Gooding—that last name I gave you—and his wife could not come by to-night and stay until—after—."

She stopped. The Doctor nodded and Mabel went on:

"He is a second cousin of ours. They haven't any children, and they could come to stay over better than any of the others, and I think they will if we ask them."

"I'll send at once," replied the Doctor.

"Hallie and I will leave you while you are writing. Emily will be here by noon, but we have some things that we need to look after up stairs," said

Mabel.

When the two sisters again appeared, they found Margaret, who had come with a true woman's heart, with a woman's sympathy and help, the sweetness and genuineness of which touched Mabel in such a way as to bring the tears, and when once started it seemed as though her whole soul was being poured out with them.

CHAPTER XII

NEW PLANS

THREE weeks later, Mabel, Emily and Hallie were over to Mrs. Holway's to dinner. It was the evening before the Doctor, Margaret and Willa were to return to Woodrow. In fact, they had already stayed a week longer than they had anticipated, and now they felt that they must not stay another day.

More than once, Mabel had thought their visit providential at this time, such a support and comfort had they been to her and her sisters. The past few weeks had wrought great changes in their lives. Plans were all made, and Hallie had been promised a position as teacher in Canton, in the same school where Emily taught, and Mabel had been asked to act as matron in the "Home for Girls," at Blanchard. The trustees had even promised to hold the position open until October, because both Dr. Channing and Dr. Warren agreed that the girl must have a rest before taking on herself any new and added duties. More than that, the girl had promised Margaret and the Doctor to spend the month of September at Woodrow. She was determined, however, now that her mother needed her no longer, that she would cease to be dependent on her uncle, who had already done so much for them.

The bulk of their furniture had been sold, and much of the money used, although uncle Dick had sent check as usual; but it seemed to the girls at that time that money was needed on all sides.

On the evening in question, Willa was allowed to sit up later than usual, the older ones thinking that her childish playfulness might be a source of pleasure and comfort to their guests, and so they were for she had won her way into the heart of each. She preferred Hallie, however, for Hallie would help her to dress or to undress her dolls, build block houses, or in fact be a child herself once more. The power to do this, as the others said after her departure, would do more than anything else to make her a successful teacher. The children would love her, and often times a poor teacher will do better work with the love of children, than a good one will without it.

"They are three noble girls, and I am proud of each one of them," said Mr. Holway.

"They feel as keenly as anyone, and yet see how bravely they bear up under it," replied his wife.

"I'm glad Mabel is going to have the month in Woodrow," said the Doctor. "That other visit did her a world of good."

"She needs it more than the others; besides they are to be together and will be company for each other," said Margaret thoughtfully.

They finally rose with the intention of starting for bed. Margaret's trunk sat at one side of the kitchen, all strapped and ready for the man to

take the next morning. What few things they had left out could go in their grip which the Doctor would carry.

It does seem as though I can't let you go," said Mrs. Holway.

"My! But we are going to miss that child!" said her husband, positively.

"Now, hear him!" said Margaret to the Doctor. "He never mentions missing us," she said, marching straight up to her father and throwing her arms around his neck.

"You two are old enough to know that we shall miss you, without our telling you," answered the good-natured man, laughingly, as he pulled her on his knee, just as he had done hundreds and hundreds of times in the past.

"I don't see what we have done that you should punish us so," he went on. "First you got the Doctor and made us love him, and then, Willa, and made us love her, and now the three of you go and leave us all alone. I think that is pretty tough on an old couple like us," he said playfully.

"Old!" cried Margaret. "You and mother'll never be old. It isn't your style," she said, pinching both his cheeks and giving him a Scotch kiss as Willa was fond of doing.

"We might stay young if we had you children around all the time," he said, "but I tell you, there is no joke to it. We do get pretty lonesome, sometimes."

"But you don't wish I had never found Hunt,

and had stayed a cross old maid all my life, now do you?" said his daughter, winking at the Doctor who stood leaning against the door-casing.

"Bless you, no! We never would have had a son if you hadn't gotten us one; and,—had we chosen him ourselves, we couldn't have loved him more," answered her father.

"Ahem! Thank you," said the Doctor. "Then you have never regretted giving her to me?" he asked, more seriously.

"Never! but we can't help missing her just the same, can we mother?" the father answered.

Mrs. Holway had just returned to the room. While the others had been talking, she had been in the pantry getting some dainties ready for their luncheon which would be packed in the morning, and which she felt she could not trust to the maid.

"Can we what?" she asked, for she had not heard what had been said.

"Of course, they know that we miss them," she replied when told the nature of the discussion, "and yet we realize each day how much we have to be thankful for. We can go to see them if they cannot always come here, and supposing Hunt was a regular scapegoat of a man, what would we do then?"

"Don't worry your head about that, mother. If he had been that kind he never would have had me," said Margaret.

For a full half-hour the four talked and laughed before separating for the night. When up-stairs,

they all took a last look at Willa, as she lay there fast asleep, the right arm thrown up over her head, and the left stretched out straight from the shoulder. Golden curls encircled the fair, fresh face, which made a picture beyond the power of any artist's brush.

"Sometimes, what you have told us seems like a dream," said Mr. Holway to the Doctor, "and then I begin to wonder if it is only a dream or a stern reality after all. She seems all that one could ask for in their own flesh and blood."

"If she continues as she has begun, she will do credit to anyone," answered the Doctor. "The only question that ever arises in my mind is whether or not we ought to love her as we do, because if another should ever claim her, it would be like taking a part of our very lives."

"I have often thought of that," answered the older man. "But, on the other hand, wouldn't it be wrong not to love a child like her?" he asked, pointing at the fairy-like picture.

"'Twould be beastly," he went on, more earnestly. "Any one with any heart at all would have to love her, besides—"

"I can't bear to think of it," said the Doctor, gently touching her little hand. "Just so long as she is with us, we shall love her, and do for her all that is within our power."

"God bless you in the effort," said Mr. Holway, warmly, as he turned to his wife who stood in the doorway talking to Margaret.

"Come, little woman," he said. We must leave the children, or none of us will be ready to get up in the morning."

CHAPTER XIII

A JOYOUS RETURN

IN spite of the good time they had had in Ripley, the three travelers were happy to be home again, and all Woodrow seemed happy to have them. They arrived in the evening just in time to escape a heavy shower, and the next morning God's out-of-doors was washed clean and sweet. Even the fresh mud puddles held a fascination for Willa, and nothing would satisfy her but to don her new rubber boots which her father had bought her in Ripley and test each puddle to be found between their house and Si's, as well as those around their own buildings, for the cow and the chickens all had to have a call from her, and be fed from her own little hands.

Hannah was still at the house, and was to remain for the day, until Mrs. Warren should have her trunk unpacked and feel ready again to take charge.

Si was indeed happy to have Willa back, following him around, asking questions that made him dizzy to answer, and some that he could not answer, like: "Why is de smoke from our chimney black, Si, and dat from your chimney white?" and many others of like propensity. However, whether he could answer them or not, it was a comfort to have her near and to hear the little voice that had

grown to be music in his ears.

The two doctors were in busy consultation. Dr. Warren had many questions to ask about his various patients throughout the town; and, although there were some unpleasant things to hear, for the most part the reports were very gratifying. When the list had been gone over, the young doctor leaned back in his chair, looked Dr. Warren straight in the eye, and in a most serious tone said:

"Naturally, I am anxious to make a success of my profession from a financial standpoint as well as in other ways, but if I were not in actual need of money, it seems to me that wherever I locate I should be satisfied if my people only loved me as these people love you."

This was something for which Dr. Warren was not looking; for he was one who never gave himself due credit, and anyone knowing him would sometimes wonder if the word "conceit" was even printed in his dictionary.

"If they love me," he replied, "it must be because I loved them first. They are as loyal, true a people as I ever knew."

"They are a good people, and their devotion to you is not merely wonderful, but beautiful."

"You are just starting out on the field that lies before you. Do you want me to give you a little piece of advice?" asked Dr. Warren.

"I surely would be glad for it," replied the younger man.

"Then let me say now that the first thing you

want to do, after you get settled, and your pocket-book will allow it, is to choose a true, earnest, lovable woman for a wife."

A smile played about the mouth of the young doctor. After a few moments, he said:

"I believe you are right; and, although I have not as yet asked her, for to do so before I have a start in life would be cheeky, I have in mind a girl whom some day I hope to make my wife."

"You want to remember that while one wants love, that alone is not enough. She needs to be a friend and companion, and then, when you take up your life-work together, you will find yourselves standing on a foundation which grows stronger and stronger as the years go by," answered Dr. Warren.

The words were scarcely uttered when Willa came bounding in. She had tried on the wet grass outside to scrape the mud from her boots; but, notwithstanding her honest efforts, there still remained many signs of her morning's play. Now and then on her apron were to be seen spatters of muddy water. Her cheeks were rosy. Her hat fallen from her head was hanging at the back of her neck by the elastic under her chin. A grimy spot was on one cheek, her chin was stained, and her hands, brown as nuts, were filled with red and white clover blossoms on which the drops of water were still clinging.

"O, papa, I 'ike my 'ubber boots a lot. See, I went ev'rywhere and never dot wet at all," she

cried.

The two men looked at her. The clovers themselves, with all their fragrance seemed to bring no more of a breath from heaven than did this rosy-cheeked, happy faced child.

"See, papa, I dot you and mama, each a botay. Are you p'leased?" she asked.

"Of course, papa is pleased. Ask mama for a dish to put them in and see how pretty they will look," he answered, appreciatively.

She started for the kitchen where her mother and Hannah were at work, and the latter found her a glass.

"But I want two. Dis is papa's and dis mama's," said the child, holding up for Hannah's inspection two boquets of clover, made as nearly alike as her childish judgment would allow.

Hannah, accordingly, brought out another glass, and soon Willa had placed her mother's on the dining-room table; with measured steps, lest she spill the water, she started with the other to her papa's study. Both he and Dr. Livermore looked up as she entered; they noted how carefully she held the glass, and how cautiously each step was taken, but Willa's eyes were fixed on the clovers; the rubber boots were new, and the rugs were not placed just as they were at grandma's where she had been for the past five weeks. The result was, the toe of one of those new rubber boots stubbed over a rug that lay in her pathway, and Willa went headlong.

The two men sprang from their chairs in the hope of saving her, but they were too late. Clovers went in every direction, and water followed, a good part of which went on Willa herself. So tightly, however was she holding the glass that, as she fell, she kept her hold of it, although to do so caused her to receive bumps on her elbow and chin that might otherwise have been averted.

The cry that came from her brought Mrs. Warren and Hannah to the scene. The Doctor picked her up and gently tried to sooth her; while Dr. Livermore picked up the pink and white clovers which those tiny fingers had gathered, so shortly before.

While the Doctor attended to the bruises, Mrs. Warren hunted up a dry dress and apron, and some slippers to take the place of the heavy boots. When these were donned the man returned to his study, and sat down with Willa in his arms. Although she felt better, sigh after sigh came as a result of her fit of weeping; and, leaning back on his strong arm, tired with her journey of the day before and the morning's tramp about the place, she soon fell asleep. For nearly half an hour, even in her sleep, a sob shook her little frame and her arm jerked. The two men spoke in whispers lest they wake her. They knew that a quiet nap would make her as good as new.

"You gave me advice a little while ago about getting married," said Dr. Livermore. "If ever I am married and am the father of a child as sweet

as your Willa, I shall be the happiest man in all the world. Do you realize that she is a remarkable child?"

"Yes, she is all right," answered the other, "and her disposition is wonderful. She will listen to one and be reasoned with; and when she fully understands a thing, she invariably chooses what she thinks is right."

"And some children would be spoiled if they were made as much of as she, but it does not seem to effect her in the least, unless it is to bring out love from her for everybody. I never saw a child like her," the young man said, shaking his head.

In the midst of this quiet talk, a call came for the Doctor. Word had gotten around that he was home. Although he answered the call himself, he insisted that Dr. Livermore drive with him, a distance of about two miles.

The Doctor so gently laid Willa on the couch that the child still slept. The two had been gone more than half an hour when she opened her eyes and found that she was alone.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW LESSONS TAUGHT

A GAIN Mabel Fairbanks came to Woodrow, and never had the place been more beautiful than during the month of September, in which she visited Margaret, the Doctor, and Willa. The reds, the yellows, the browns, the greens all blended in autumnal glory such as is seldom seen. The tired, worn out girl, pale from care, trouble and worry seemed to catch something of the splendor about her; a color came to her cheeks, and a light and sparkle to her eyes such as would have surprised her friends in Ripley. Again, she took those delightful drives here and there in Woodrow; and, when not driving hour after hour was spent with Willa in the open air, for the Doctor had insisted on her staying out of doors as much as possible. However, with the beauty of Woodrow on the one hand, and the companionship of a child as original, clever, and attractive as Willa on the other, obeying the Doctor's orders was not so difficult a task. Sometimes, long strolls were taken, when lunch boxes were in evidence; sometimes a fishing trip was enjoyed, for the river ran within a mile of the Doctor's house. It would have been hard, indeed, for an onlooker to have told which of the two was getting the more enjoyment from the little outing.

Although only once did they catch anything, they certainly had the pleasure of seeing the speckled trout darting up and down, in and out, beneath the water; and, as though imbued with the true Ike Walton spirit they found joy in fishing other than the reward which is usually expected.

These were happy days for Mabel, as well as for her loyal friends who took such keen pleasure in watching from day to day the change that was taking place in her. During those days she surely learned to appreciate the true worth of her two old friends, and her new little friend as never before.

One day when she had been there about two weeks, she and Willa returned from one of their tramps, not a very long one, but a pleasant one, and joined Mrs. Warren who sat on the porch hemming a dainty lawn apron for Willa. This had to be laid aside as Willa came bounding to her, both hands filled with treasures such as mosses and gorgeous leaves of indescribable beauty, freshly gathered from the woods. Willa's eye was particularly well trained for a child of her years, largely due to the fact that the spring before her father had taken her to the woods, where together they had tried, on one day, to see how many kinds of mosses they could find; on another, how many kinds of ferns, and so on until Willa's powers of perception manifested themselves in such a way as to surprise even the Doctor. The lessons learned then had come with Willa through the intervening days and months; until now, in her tramps with

Mabel, they again had a chance to show themselves, furnishing delight for the girl so much older in years, and yet from this point of view no more alert or appreciative than this wee lady of four summers.

As the child bestowed these "woody" treasures on her mother, the latter admired the selection of the little girl before her who was eagerly waiting for words of appreciation and approval.

Before they were scarcely aware of the fact, it was supper time. As Mrs. Warren gathered up her sewing and work box, she saw among the spools of cotton a thimble belonging to Hannah. Having at that moment thought of something she wished to say to Mabel and which she did not wish Willa to hear, she took advantage of the opportunity and said: "Here is Hannah's thimble that she left yesterday. Doesn't Willa want to run down with it?"

Willa was very fond of visiting Hannah, and was at once ready to comply with her mother's suggestion. Taking the thimble she slipped it over one of her little fingers, and shut her hand tightly lest she lose it. For the time being, both Mrs. Warren and Mabel forgot the child; they did not think of her again until they saw the Doctor drive into the yard, and Willa, sitting beside him, with both her little hands locked around his arm.

Si, who was in the shed, came out to put up the horse, and as the Doctor lifted Willa from the buggy, she put her chubby hand into the pocket of her

apron and drew out a tiny, delicate shell. As they went into the house together, she exclaimed: "See, isn't it pretty?"

"A shell? Hannah give you that?" asked her father, taking the shell from her and examining it.

"No, 'twas in her box wiv de freed when I put de fimble back," quickly replied Willa.

"And did she give it to you, or did you just take it?" asked the Doctor, earnestly.

"Why, I toot it. Ain't it pretty?" enquired the child innocently.

The Doctor did not answer. He put the shell into his pocket, and somehow Willa began to feel that something was not right, although she could not have told what. He said nothing further on the subject until the next morning, although he had lain awake more than one hour in the night thinking the matter over, and wondering what he ought to do. He was conscious that Willa did not know the meaning of the word "steal," but how was he to teach her? Her sense of right and wrong had always been most acute for a child of her years, but here was a new problem and one which must be faced at once. It was not a question of the value of the shell, or of Hannah's willingness that the child should have it, but of the lesson involved which was just the same as though a million dollars had been taken.

At last he felt he had a solution to his present problem. At any rate, it was worth trying and he hoped for the best. He remembered that Willa

was learning to read. Before she was three years old she had learned the letters from her colored blocks with which she played, and during the past year she had read her First Reader nearly through. When morning came, he took her on his knee in his study, took down the Bible, and explained to her that if he should give her that book it would be hers; but, if she took it without asking him it would still be his, and she would be *stealing*. The use of two or three illustrations enabled her to see that there was a difference between receiving something as a gift, and stealing, or taking, the same thing. Then, he gently said, "What book is this, Willa?"

"It's de Bible," she promptly answered.

"Who gave us the Bible? Whose words do we find in it?" he asked.

"Dod's words."

"Now, I want to show you something," he said, turning to the Ten Commandments, from which he picked out the seventh one and asked her to look at it with him. With a little help in sounding the letters, Willa was able to read the commandment for herself. When she had finished, he said, "Now, what does that say, Willa?"

"Thou s'alt not steal," she read.

"And who said that? Who tells us that we must not steal?" he asked.

"Dod. O, papa, me didn't know Dod said not to steal. Baby never steal aden, papa, never. What else does Dod say?"

"I think this is lesson enough for this morning, dear. But another time you come to papa when you want to know if something is right or wrong, and papa will tell you. You won't forget, will you?"

"No, papa, me always 'member what Dod said," she answered.

"And you are sorry that you took the shell from Hannah?" he asked.

"Me didn't tate it from Hannah. Me toot it from de bastit," said Willa.

The big man tried to keep from smiling as he said, "I know, dear, that the shell was in the basket, but it belonged to Hannah, you know, and you are sorry aren't you?"

"Me tate it straight back, papa, and me tell Hannah baby didn't know what Dod said," answered Willa.

The Doctor felt relieved. This was just what he had been leading up to, and rather feared lest she find the task a hard one. He now saw that her dread of displeasing God was so great that the embarrassment of confessing her fault to Hannah seemed trivial indeed.

As the Doctor took the shell from his pocket and gave it to her, he folded her in his arms for a moment, and then said, "Now you take this to Hannah and tell her all about it, and then God will be pleased with Willa, again."

"But Dod tan't spe't a little dirl lite me to know all dat's in a dreat bid Bible, tan He, papa?"

"No, but he does want her to learn, and to do the best she knows, doesn't He?"

"O' tourse, and me never do it den, papa," she said, earnestly.

"Papa knows you won't. Now run along like a little lady," said the Doctor.

As Willa ran out, she passed her mother and Mabel in the kitchen as though nothing unusual had happened. She did not know that, in the meantime, her mother had been down to Hannah's, had told her all about it, and asked her when Willa should come not to give her the shell lest the lesson learned might soon be forgotten. Knowing as they did how fond Hannah was of Willa, both Mrs. Warren and the Doctor feared that in her pity for the child she might be tempted to do the very thing which she ought not to do, and hence it was agreed between them that Hannah should be prepared. The result was that in less than five minutes Willa was back, bright and happy, and eating one of Hannah's caraway cookies. No one referred to the incident, but the remembrance of it stayed in the minds of all, especially in the mind of Willa, who never forgot the lesson that her father had so tenderly taught her that morning.

CHAPTER XV

THE INVITATION

“**O**, MARGARET, what shall I do?” cried Mabel.

Mrs. Warren glanced down the pathway and saw her friend coming toward the house, wearing an excited, eager expression on her face. Willa ran along by her side, saying, “Don’ go, Auntie Mabel. P’ease don’ go.”

Mrs. Warren caught Willa’s words, and, looking at the open letter in Mabel’s hands, said: “They haven’t sent for you to begin work, have they?”

“No, it’s uncle Dick. Just listen!”

And Mabel proceeded to read aloud the letter which had completely upset her, and which ran as follows:

“MY DEAR MABEL:—

Wife and I have a plan. It’s about you, only you are to have nothing to say concerning it. You have only to help in carrying it out. Here is the plan, and you just see if it isn’t the jolliest one that could be thought of.”

“If that doesn’t sound just like uncle Dick!” said Mabel, and then she continued:

“As soon as you can straighten things out there, if they must be straightened, you pack up your

duds and come out to spend the winter with us. It will do you more good than anything else in the world, and to show you that we do not mean to take 'no' for an answer, we are enclosing check for \$200. That will get you anything you need, and buy your ticket. There will be nothing more for you to think of until you get here.

"We are thinking that you will probably start by the 1st of October, anyway. You just tell that place that wants you for matron that you can't and won't take it, or at least not until another spring. If they choose to hold the offer open until then, well and good. If not, that settles it. You must come anyway.

"Lots of love from

"UNCLE DICK."

"There!" exclaimed Mabel, with a sigh as she threw herself into one of the easy chairs on the porch. "What shall I do?"

"Do?" answered Margaret. "There is only one thing to do and that is to go, of course. It will do you so much good, Mabel. It will be the time of your life."

Willa, not understanding the full purport of the letter or even of her mother's answer, ran to her mother, saying, "P'ease, mama, don' send auntie Mabel way."

"Bless you, dear, mama is not sending her away," said her mother, who then took Willa on her knee and explained the kindness of the uncle,

the good the change would do auntie Mabel; and then, appealing to the child's sense of unselfishness, she led her to see that it was for Mabel's good, and the more they loved her, the more they should want her to go.

The child on seeing the situation, slipped from her mother's knee and went slowly to Mabel's side. Stretching up both plump arms to encircle Mabel's neck, she said:

"Willa wants auntie Mabel go, too. Willa wants her to be happy and well, and has f'owers all winter, an' dood time ev'y day, and then auntie Mabel'll come back some other day?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, dear," answered Mabel folding her arms tightly about Willa and kissing her.

"But what will auntie Mabel do without you?" she asked tenderly. "Will you come with me?"

"Why, Willa touldn't go. Willa dot to teep papa and mama tompany. Who'd yub mama's headache way when papa's gone? And who'd det papa's s'ippers for him, and do all the other fings?"

"Precious!" exclaimed Mabel, still holding her. "Auntie Mabel forgot, didn't she, dear, that papa and mama couldn't spare you?"

"Des she must have. She'll have to det a little dirl o' her own, won't she, mama?"

Willa at that moment espied their team in the distance, and ran away to meet it.

The Doctor on his arrival was soon told of Ma-

bel's good fortune, and he, too, endeavored to make her feel that there was no alternative. The trip would mean much to her, and he felt that uncle Dick's invitation was simply God's plan for blessing Mabel, and in his opinion she must not refuse.

Mabel seriously weighed the pro and con of the situation, even though her heart was agreeing to all that her friends said. At last it was decided that she should write to the trustees of the "Home" to see what they would say. September was already more than half gone. It was useless for her to think of starting by the first of the following month; and, even if she started by the middle, she must shorten her visit in Woodrow, must leave by the coming Saturday at the latest. This was Monday. She felt that by Friday she should have an answer informing her of whatever action the trustees might choose to take. Until that letter came, she felt she could not come to any final conclusion.

Em and Hallie were also written; for they, to her, presented the greatest obstacle. How could she leave them? was the question that she asked herself many times a day.

Never were Mabel and Willa more vigilant in watching the mails than they were during those days that followed. Mabel realized how much they meant to her. Secretly she had determined that, unless the trustees of the "Home" were willing to hold the position until spring, she would not go to uncle Dick's. It was almost too much to expect, and yet, somehow, inside, she felt that an an-

swer in the affirmative would come.

The morning mail on Friday brought the looked for letter, which read:

"DEAR MISS FAIRBANKS:

"Your letter of the 8th rec'd. and duly considered by the Board. Inasmuch as we look to you for a permanent engagement at the "Home," when you do undertake its duties, we have secured the consent of our temporary supply, Mrs. Sullivan, to remain during the winter.

"Trusting that this action meets your wishes, and that the months spent in California may prove beneficial to you, we are,

"Respectfully yours,

(Sd.) ——— Sec."

"*Weren't they good?*" asked Mabel, emphasizing each word.

In the hours that followed, she was first happy and then sad—happy at the good fortune that had befallen her, and sad at the thoughts of first leaving these fond friends; and then, a little later, her two sisters and everything that had been a part of her very life for so many years. She felt that she must leave Woodrow on the following day. In vain did the Doctor and Margaret urge her to stay "just one more Sunday," as they said. No thought, however, of accepting the invitation entered her mind until she accidentally passed the door of Margaret's room, where she saw Willa kneeling by

the side of her little bed and heard the honest, childish voice as it said:

"O, Dod, I do wants auntie Mabel stay anuzzer Sunday. P'ease, Dod, tell her to stay, 'tause auntie Mabel'll mind you, but she won't mind us. Tell her hard, Dod, so she'll be sure to hear. Amen."

The child still knelt with her head buried in the white spread covering the little bed, and Mabel passed on.

God *had* told her "hard," and Mabel would stay. When alone with the Doctor and Margaret, she told them of Willa's prayer and of her changed plans. She would stay with them until Monday.

"I never saw a child with such faith in prayer as she has," said Mabel, "and I won't be the means of shaking that faith; besides, I think I am rather glad to help God to answer."

When Mrs. Warren told the good news to Willa, she said: "I guess you are surprised and happy now, aren't you?"

"O, I's happy, mama, but I ain't s'prised any, 'tause I jest told Dod 'bout it, and asked Him to tell auntie Mabel to stay, and I knew He would do it somehow or uzzer."

The confident tone itself made both her companions think of that verse: "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

CHAPTER XVI

OLD MEMORIES

DR. LIVERMORE spent his vacation at his old home in Springdale. He had heard of a good opening in Canton, and was to go to his new field early in September.

One day during his stay at home, his father came to his room and the two had a long talk together. The young doctor stood with his elbow resting on the middle sash of one of the windows. He watched his father carefully as he paced back and forth, both hands tucked deep into his pockets, while between his teeth was a butt of a cigar, which, if allowed to burn much longer, would endanger his stubby mustache. However, the old man kept on, apparently unmindful that a spark remained at the end of the one cigar in which he daily indulged.

At heart, the old man was not one whit more temperate than many other men who daily indulge in a half dozen or more; for, the truth is, at one time he was a cigar fiend, and had only ceased to be such at the strict command of his family physician, who discovered that the man was already suffering from a "tobacco heart." The man had used tobacco in some form ever since he could remember, and it was a mystery to all why his only

son, reared in such an atmosphere, had not fallen a victim to the habit. On the other hand, Henry, all through his college days, had stood the test; in fact, it was rather repulsive to him. Possibly, he had seen so much of it at times when his mother was saving in every conceivable way, in order that he himself might finish the college course which he had begun, that his eyes had been opened to the saving of money on the one hand and the burning of it on the other; or possibly it was all this, intensified by his having unintentionally overheard when a young lad the conversation of two ladies for whom he had great admiration and respect, the remark of one being: "If men who use tobacco only half realized how unclean it makes them seem to others and how offensive the smell is, I am sure they never would have begun." Whether one or all of these reasons played a part in influencing the young man, he certainly never wavered.

On this day in question, as the father paced back and forth in his son's room, he halted on the hearth to knock the ashes from his cigar. As he did so, he noticed one of the pictures on Henry's mantle. The man stood staring at the face of a child, apparently, three or four years of age. After looking at it intently for several seconds, he took it from the mantle, and carried it to the window in order to get a closer view. Henry watched him intently. The picture was an exact likeness of Willa, and the one Henry had brought from Woodrow. Not a word had been said by him concerning any re-

semblance he had discovered; and yet, he had purposely left the photograph on his mantle to see if another might find the same resemblance. Several minutes passed.

"Where did you get this?" the old man asked, almost gruffly.

"O, that picture? That is Willa Warren, the Doctor's little girl," Henry answered, lightly. "She is one of the brightest little tots I ever saw," he added, eyeing his father, sharply.

"Dr. Warren's, eh? Well, who's the mother?" asked the old man.

"That's a funny question. She is Dr. Warren's wife, of course," answered Henry, as though no thought of the true purport of his father's question had entered his mind.

"Humph! Let her be his wife, but who was she before she was married?"

"Miss Margaret Holway, only child of one of the bankers at Ripley," Henry answered.

"Mighty strange!" exclaimed his father.

"What's strange?" quired Henry, innocently.

"Why, the likeness, boy the likeness!"

"What likeness, father?" asked Henry.

"O, the deuce, boy! Look at that now. Then look at this," he said, drawing from his pocket a childish picture of his sister Emily.

This is what Henry had wanted. He had wished to see the two together.

"They do look alike. How strange!" he said.

"Strange? I don't see how any child could look

more like another than this looks like little Emily. Are you sure—there is—no mistake?" he asked, eagerly.

"I am very sure, father. Now that you, too, have seen the resemblance I confess that I noticed it one day when I was in Woodrow and the folks in Ripley. Since my return I have looked for this picture of aunt Em, but could not find it, so I left this one of Willa out, for I wanted you to see it. But there is no mistake, nothing on which to build. One day I found the family Bible of the Doctor's, and looked back over all the names entered, and there was not one in any way connected with our family. I have since heard a good deal of the Holways, and it is no use; there is not the slightest ground for hope, but I never saw a dearer child, and never parents who loved a child more," answered Henry.

A sigh was his father's only answer. He passed Willa's picture to Henry, and replaced that of his sister in his inner vest pocket.

"I would like to see her," he at last exclaimed. "It seems as though a child who looks so much like Em must be like her, too. A child never lived with more winning ways than Emily Livermore had when she was the age of this one. Perhaps I noticed them more than most brothers would have because she was a doll to me. Why, I was twenty when Emily was born, and she thought so much of her "Bud" as she used to call me. We never had a break until—that—pennyweight came along. What a fool I was! I thought I knew my little

Em, but I didn't, I didn't. I thought if father and I stood firm on the property, it would hold her, but she loved him—loved him! If I could only find her!" the old man said, shaking his head and burying his face in his hands.

The old man rambled on, apparently unmindful of his son's presence, who, with all his interest and sympathy could not comprehend his father's feelings when, for a moment, against the horizon he thought he had detected the ship of hope headed toward him, only to discover that what seemed so promising was only the outspread wings of a distant bird on his way to that mysterious "realm of somewhere." Would it ever return?

CHAPTER XVII

MUTUAL FRIENDS

YOUNG Henry Livermore, M. D., had been in Canton a week, and thus far had boarded at one of the two hotels which the place afforded. Both because Henry was naturally a lover of home life and because of his not overcrowded pocketbook, he then made inquiries regarding good board in either a private family or some respectable boarding house. Several places were recommended, but as the name of "Mrs. Brackett" was mentioned more frequently than any other, he called to see her.

Mrs. Brackett was a widow about forty-five years of age, fleshy, light complexioned, and one who knew so well how to cook a meal for hungry men and women that her extra rooms were never long vacant, nor her table lonesome for lack of company. The young man was not long in engaging both room and board, and promised to move on the following day, which he did, little dreaming at the time, nor in fact for several days afterward, the nature of the surprise that awaited him. Nevertheless, the day came when he learned that two of Mrs. Brackett's boarders were none other than Emily and Hallie Fairbanks of Ripley; and even then, several days passed before the three discovered that they had friends in common. The

discovery certainly tended to form a cord of friendship between them stronger, perhaps, than it would otherwise have been. Many things they had of common interest. One subject was ever a welcome one to all—the subject of Willa Warren; for the three had seen and known her, and more than that, had loved her.

Before long Dr. Livermore learned through others of the great sorrow that had so recently befallen the two sisters, which accounted for the black they continually wore. Possibly the knowledge of this trouble under which the two girls bore up so bravely had a part to play in increasing the interest which he soon had in them. The young man conscientiously tried to be impartial. During the fall months, when the leaves were at the height of their glory—especially to one who had not visited Woodrow in autumn—if he was called on a Saturday morning to drive a few miles into the country, he invited the Misses Fairbanks to accompany him. By no outward sign did he show preference for the company of either, but secretly—for he dared not admit it even to himself, he found he possessed a deeper interest in Emily than even he himself would wish. Was he not simply waiting until he should be in a position financially to ask another girl to marry him? Had he not long felt more than a passing interest in Madeline Lamson? What did this new interest mean? Did he not know his own mind? Was he fickle? What was the trouble?

Again and again, he asked himself these questions. He must wait and see. In the meantime he felt thankful that the step, which many times he had longed to take, had never been taken; for, if it should prove that he had been mistaken in the past, he would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had not wronged another. In the weeks that followed, Dr. Livermore kept a close watch of himself, and perhaps an equally close watch of Miss Emily.

The young man soon met with favor throughout the town of Canton. He was invited to all the social functions; but when he discovered that his two friends were never present, he wondered if they were not invited, or if they shrank from going into public so soon after the sorrow that had come into their lives. He watched for some remark to be dropped that might throw light on the subject, but none came. Finally, he began to be numbered among the absent; outwardly, by reason of a sudden call from a distance, when in reality he was merely driving to Four Corners and back, or to Maple Grove and back.

Only two people, however, even suspected the carrying out of this little part by the young Doctor. At school Emily and Hallie invariably heard these social events discussed, both previous to and the day following. If the young man was absent, the fact was always, unintentionally, made known to them. Why should they think of this little act of caprice on his part? Neither could have told,

and yet they felt sure they were right, and so they were, although the people of Canton were much longer in guessing the truth.

Before Mabel's departure they insisted on her spending a week with them, which visit resulted in Mabel, also, meeting Dr. Livermore. Under the conditions, he scarcely seemed a stranger to her, even at first, so attracted had they both been to the town of Woodrow, where such happy, helpful weeks for both had been spent. It was already the middle of October, and this last week of Mabel's went all too quickly. The two sisters certainly made the most of mornings and nights, as well as the brief noon hours. However, betwixt and between, Mabel had no time to be lonely; for nearly everyone in the house felt some desire to have a part in the entertainment of this elder sister who thus far had seen so little real pleasure, and Dr. Livermore was no exception. He had the advantage over the others, however, for he was able to let her get glimpses here and there about the town, and together they had a chance to compare it with their loved Woodrow. There was no simple pleasure that Mabel could put before driving. It seemed strange to her now that she should be having drives in Canton when she had thought that this season's pleasure in that direction was over on her departure from Woodrow.

The people at Mrs. Brackett's took it merely as a matter of fact—this friendship between Dr. Livermore and the two young ladies in black. Some

had it that they were relatives, some this, some that, but one good old Sallie Simmons said: "It's jist a common sinse sort o' a likin' fer one anither." However, if that were the case, there was still a mystery to solve, and that was, "For which one of the girls in black was the Doctor's 'common sinse likin'' the stronger?"

Thus had Mabel found them, and thus she left them. When the time of separation came, not one of them could speak. Was good awaiting them, or was ill lying ahead in their pathway to be encountered and battled with before they next should meet? Each knew that this thought was in the minds of the others, and the knowledge, blended with her own thoughts, made speech impossible.

Who so hardened, who so far down, that he cannot hear even the echo of a note of love, whether sounded on the mountain top, or down in the valley? Whether sounded by human lips, or simply by the passing of a spirit of unity across the heart-strings of one he loves?

CHAPTER XVIII

AT UNCLE DICK'S

ON the day before Thanksgiving, Mrs. Warren had her first long letter from Mabel. In this letter she had more than the usual interest, and could scarcely wait for an opportunity to read it aloud to the Doctor. It read:

“DEAREST MARGARET:

“Forgive me for not writing you a real letter before, but things have moved so rapidly I could not seem to get to it. Besides, I scarcely knew how to begin, and I confess that I do not, now. However, I suppose it may as well be at the beginning and then you will understand.

“I arrived on the 27th. Uncle Dick, aunt Mary, and Cousin Fred met me, and brought me to their home which is indeed a most beautiful one. I had to rest for a few days, of course, and Fred certainly kept me from being homesick. He is only sixteen, but almost as tall as the Doctor, with long, thin arms and legs, and naturally awkward as you would expect any boy of that age and size to be, but the best boy and the funniest one you ever saw. He has a fine face and a good head, so just wait until he gets a few more years over him, and the corresponding pounds to go with them, and he will

be a 'star' all right.

"Well, so much for that. When I had been here a week, uncle wanted me to go to Los Angeles with him, as he had business to attend to. Over and over again I had heard them speak of a 'Willard Irving' over there, and I naturally inquired who he was. They told me that he was a promising 'young old bach' with whom Uncle Dick was greatly pleased, and with whom he had many business relations. I further learned that he was connected with some corporation in Los Angeles in which Uncle Dick was an owner and also a director.

"Well, we went. Uncle had taken me to two or three places, when he looked at his watch and found that it was 11:30. He left me at a hotel, while he went to see Willard and, if possible, get him to come to lunch with us. Uncle started and, knowing that I was to meet a stranger and a friend of my uncle's, I dug into my bag for my comb, and in the next few minutes made myself as presentable as a good wash and combing could make me. When that was done, I went to the window and looked out. I heard footsteps and then voices—uncle's and another. I listened but had no time for thought before the door opened, and Margaret, don't think I am lying or crazy or dreaming, but uncle's friend, 'Willard Irving' is Clifford—Clifford Illsley.

"I can't tell it all, Margaret, but you can imagine what the next moments were.

"Uncle Dick stood back and stared. I never saw a man so surprised in his life. We had to go back and tell him all before he could grasp it, and when he did, he said: 'The name, Willard? What's that?'

"*'Willard'* is my middle name, and *'Irving'* my mother's maiden name. I used my own until one year in Chicago, the year I came to Los Angeles, when another fellow had a name just like it, and he got into trouble. His name was in all the papers till I was sick of the sight of it; I was afraid some people might think it was I. When I came here, I wanted to make a go of it, and I did not want to be handicapped by a name, so I took the Willard Irving one. I have wanted a lot of times to tell you, but it did not seem necessary; besides, when you talked of your niece, and her possible coming, I did not dare for fear you might tell her, and then I knew she would never come. We—we had a foolish little quarrel, you know, explained Clifford.

"'Quarrel, eh?' said uncle, looking straight at me until my face got so red I thought I should sink through the floor, and yet I did not want to; for, Margaret, it did seem good to see Clifford, and to know that he has made good and has the respect of everyone around here. I am sorry about the name, of course, and yet if it were not for his having hidden behind it, we probably would never have met; for I certainly would never have come had I known he was here.

"I guess, Margaret, I was as much to blame as he, and I am so glad it is over. Anyhow, you may as well know the 'worst' or the 'best,' whichever you care to call it; for we have agreed 'not to disagree,' but to 'agree;' to forget our childish foolishness, and he insists on our making Christmas our wedding day. Of course, you will know at once just what uncle says, where he thinks so much of Clifford, and where he wants me out here, anyway.

"I tell them we must wait until Easter. However, I have just written the trustees of the 'Home,' asking them to withdraw my name from their list.

"My! How little I dreamed of anything like this when I came!

"You don't blame me, do you Margaret? You know that you and Hunt always liked Clifford, and truly, Margaret, he has improved a lot. I told him so, and he stuck to it that if he had, it was his thinking of me and his being with my uncle where he so often heard of me that kept up his courage to fight it out.

"It was so strange that he knew almost at the first about their eastern relations, but all the time they never suspected that he was from a section farther east than Chicago.

"If I do stay here, Margaret, you and Hunt and Willa will surely have to visit me.

"I haven't been able to decide anything definite yet, except that we are to be married, and I am to have my engagement ring on Thanksgiving Day.

I wonder if the turkey will taste any better because of it?

"There, dear, I must stop. Give my love to the Doctor and Willa, and know that you have your own big share, from

"MABEL.

"P. S. O, if mother could only know! But perhaps she does."

CHAPTER XIX

THE ANGEL'S MISTAKE

DR. WARREN'S house was less than an eighth of a mile from the school-house, and seldom a recess came when Willa did not run home to see her mother, either to tell her something that had happened, or to get an apple, cookie, or piece of ginger-bread. From the time she first entered the doors of learning, nothing grieved her more than to miss any lesson. Certainly, it was unusual for her to be begging to stay at home as she was doing one morning in early June, the summer that she herself would be six; in fact, the very month.

"Mama, I don't want to go to school. I want to see the baby, and I want papa to bring him home where he belongs," wailed Willa.

"But, dear, you cannot see the baby this morning, and you know that Si and Hannah didn't have any little boy or girl at all to keep them company," her mother reasoned.

"But I know it's our baby, mama," she said between her sobs. "I've prayed and prayed every night since I was at grandma's that summer and saw Jennie, and now God sent me one, and the angels,—” here she sobbed aloud as though her heart would break—"the angels"—another sob broke forth, "came at night," she continued, "and, 'twas

dark, an',—boohoo, got—the—wrong house. They meant it—for me—but they couldn't see," she added jerkily, between her sobs.

Mrs. Warren sat with the child in her lap for fully half an hour. Her reasoning powers were sorely taxed in trying to reconcile Willa to the present situation, and still have her hold her faith in prayer. At last, the Doctor arrived, and Willa presented her case to him, blaming the darkness for the great mistake made, and saying she wished it was never night and never dark.

"Now, just think, Willa," he said kindly. "You and the other children, and we big people, too, have the sunshine all day long, don't we?"

"Y-e-s," she answered.

"And while we are having it, the little boys and girls on the other side of the world are sound asleep. It is all dark there, then, for they are having their night; but it wouldn't be fair to leave them in the dark all the time, would it?" he asked.

"N-o."

"You see the sun comes to visit us, and we have day; and then, it is only fair for it to go to visit them, and give them some day, isn't it? You wouldn't want to keep it all the time, and never let the other little boys and girls have any, would you?"

"N-o, but—but—but the baby," she said, brokenly, her lips trembling.

"Don't you see, Willa, if the angels had left it here, we would have had two, you and the new

one, and Si and Hannah still would have had none at their house. You love Si and Hannah, and you wouldn't want to treat them that way, would you?" he asked.

"No,—only,—don't you see, papa, I asked God—to send me one, and—"

"And He did send one to be your nearest neighbor. Just think how often you can see him, and before long he will be able to play with you."

"How long, papa?" she asked, anxiously.

"In two or three years he will be running around, but long before that he will be able to play with you, and to know what you say to him," answered the Doctor.

"What you s'pose they'll call him, papa?" Willa asked in a tone which told her father at once that the grievance was fast disappearing.

"I don't know yet," he answered.

"Well, I think they ought to name him *Mabel*," said Willa, emphatically.

Both the Doctor and his wife laughed, which made Willa add, still more seriously:

"Well, I do, papa, for Auntie Mabel, you know, 'cause I think she liked babies awful well."

"But 'Mabel' is a girl's name, and people never give to little boys the same names they do to girls. Didn't you know that?"

"I don't see *why*. A *name's* a *name*, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, a name is a name, but you wouldn't want us to call you 'Tommy' would you?" he answered.

"Of course not," she laughed. "I didn't think o' that," and her tone alone conveyed the idea that she was satisfied her argument had failed.

The next moment they heard the sound of boys and girls at play. They knew it was recess; and, taking advantage of her changed mood, they persuaded her to join the others for the remainder of the forenoon, and assured her that she should see the baby before night.

It is needless to say, for that day at least, Willa's mind was on the baby more frequently than on her lessons. She even took out her tiny slate, bought for her in Ripley, the frame of which was padded with red felt and fastened with black cord, giving it a most distinguished appearance in the little school-house of Woodrow. This had been a source of delight to Willa, as long ago she had manifested an unusual talent for drawing. On this particular afternoon she drew on it what to her seemed a very fine picture of a baby, and beneath it she printed.

"JOSUF CAMBEL,"

in not very regular letters; nevertheless, she was proud of her accomplishment and had to carry it home for her father and mother to see. They always followed the rule of, "Praise where you can; censure where you must," and now they followed the first part of the precept, for her efforts were certainly worthy of praise, notwithstanding the fact that they provoked laughter.

"So you've named the baby, have you?" asked

the Doctor.

"Yes," answered Willa, "if he's got to have a boy's name, I thought 'Josuf' was the little boy in the Bible that his father loved so well he made him that nice, pretty coat. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"He made it 'cause he loved him so much, an' I knew that Si and Hannah'd love this baby, and it sounded good when I said 'Josuf Cambel,' don't you think so?" she asked.

"Sounds fine. You didn't get it spelled just right, but it sounds about the same," said the Doctor. "You find your little story book and see how it is there."

Away Willa ran, soon coming back with her book opened to the right place, saying aloud:

"J-o-s-e-p-h, O, yes. I forgot. Let me change it."

"Don't rub that out," cautioned the Doctor. "We will take it down to show Hannah and Si. You can print it the right way underneath. Wouldn't that be better?"

Willa agreed that it would, and at once got her pencil to work, carefully making the letters. Her father cautioned her not to be too anxious over it, as possibly Si and Hannah had already decided on a name.

The result was, however, that Willa had her wish, with the addition of a middle name; and Joseph Warren Campbell in due time made the acquaintanceship of the people of Woodrow.

CHAPTER XX

ECHOES FROM CANTON

MABEL FAIRBANKS IRVING sat in her room up-stairs holding a letter she had just received from her sister, Emily, who was still in Canton.

“DEAREST MABEL:—

“It is no use. You may as well make up your mind to it first as last. You know there is no reason in the world why you cannot come. If Clifford got along without you all those other years, he surely can get along now for six weeks while you come to be with me over my wedding.

“I admit that I was not with you, but that does not excuse you in the least, for you went out there just on a visit; and then did the thing up so quickly that I had no chance to go, besides, it came right in the middle of the school year.

“We are to be married in the early part of September, but are not sure of the day yet. I’ll have my summer vacation to get ready in.

“Henry’s father wants us to be married at the old home, and Mrs. Holway says she thinks we ought to go to her house. She thinks mother would like it so, and I am not sure but I shall decide in her favor. That would be nearer ‘home’ than any place.

"As you know, Henry and I have been saving for the last three years, but we shall need all those dollars to start our home with, so going to California just for the sake of being married at your house is out of the question. You can afford the trip as well as not, and ought to take it both for your own sake and for ours.

"You understand, we are not to have any real 'wedding' at all. We are just going to be married in our own quiet way, and save all expense that a big 'show' would cost. I never did believe in them, and Henry is as much averse to them as I.

"We have the dearest, dearest house rented. Henry says we may buy it later if the owner will sell. It is out about a mile, a one family house, with stable, garden, and the most beautiful shrubbery on the lawn. It is to be newly painted, papered, and whitened, so it will surely shine when it gets our new things in it. We only got it a week ago. Henry has been trying for a month to make the deal. For years it was occupied by two doubled and twisted old maids, and this last year they both died. A nephew who now owns it was thinking of remodeling it into a two family house to rent, believing it would bring him in more money, but Henry finally won him over. I am so pleased about it.

"Won't we have fun settling, though? School is only one week more, and then I shall be *free, free, free*. Hooray for Em! I certainly must keep the check rein tight or I shall run away with myself I am so happy. I wonder if everyone feels

so? They must if they marry for love, mustn't they?

"Will say 'good-night,' sister mine. You must come, or I shall never forgive you.

"Heaps of love,

"EM."

Mabel read her sister's letter more than once, alternating the reading with the sewing which rested on the top of her basket by the window.

"I'll see what Clifford thinks," she at last said, as she broke off a fresh needle full of thread. "Let's see. It is 3:30 now. He'll be here in another hour."

Mabel had a dainty, attractive home, and everything in it harmonized with the thought of comfort, health, and happiness. Indeed, those three valuable assets had been added in abundance to Mabel's life since her coming to visit Uncle Dick and her marriage to Clifford. The fact that she was separated from her sisters and Margaret was her only grievance.

The letter just read, and the thoughts of her sister's approaching marriage caused her again to go to old scenes and old friends, and more than all to that time when days, and nights if necessary, she was her mother's faithful watcher. In some ways it seemed a hundred years ago, so different were her surroundings and life now; and yet in other ways it seemed only yesterday, so clearly did it all come before her. Anxiously, she watched for

Clifford. Mabel still clung to the old name, although he was still "Willard Irving" to the public. He had, however, gotten into the way of signing "C. Willard Irving," and the "C. Willard" was correct.

When he did come, Mabel passed him Emily's letter.

"Read it, Clifford," she said.

"Well?" he said, when he had done so and laid the letter on the arm of his chair.

"That is what I am saying," she laughed back.

To Mabel it seemed that Clifford waited fully five minutes before answering, but the clock did not measure more than half that time.

"You don't know how I hate to have you go, Mabe, but I don't want to be selfish about it," he said. "You owe a duty to your sisters, and I owe one to you; besides, dear," he added, as he rose and went to her, "we know how next year it will be impossible for you to go, so—maybe—"

"I hate to go, Clifford, just as much as you hate to have me, and yet, I *want* to go. You can understand, can't you?"

"I understand, Mabe."

"As you say, I shall be needed right here next year. See what I have been making? Isn't it a dear? It seems to me that I can't wait for the time to come," she said, almost reverently.

"Nor I," he answered, smoothing her hair gently with his hands.

"I have not written the girls yet, and if I decide

to go, I shall not tell them until I get there. They will be almost as glad as I. You ought to have seen them the summer Margaret had Willa down home for the first time. They were just in love with her."

"How long ago was that?" he asked.

"Almost three years—the summer mother died, you know. She was four then, and the dearest child I ever saw."

"She ought to be a dear. Her mother was a treasure."

"That's what Margaret is, all right," answered Mabel.

Clifford started, but caught himself in time to keep from putting strange thoughts into Mabel's mind. Soon after her arrival he had questioned her carefully about the Doctor and Margaret, and inquired if they now had any children. On being told of Willa, he saw at once that Mabel was not aware of the child's parentage; and, knowing on what intimate terms the two women were, he was convinced that Mrs. Warren preferred to keep the secret, and he resolved then and there never to be the one to betray his knowledge of it.

Again he and Mabel discussed the trip, the time she better start; and, incidentally, the cost. Finally, the following letter went back to Canton:

"DEAR LITTLE EM:

"Neither Clifford nor I can say 'no' to you at a time like this.

"I can only hope that your married life may be as happy as mine has been so far; and the best of it is, I grow happier every day. If we both had not been two stubborn children, we need never have had that break, but we have certainly made up for it since.

"I rather like the idea of the ceremony taking place at Mrs. Holway's. It was kind in her to suggest it anyway.

"I can't tell yet just when I shall start. I only know that Clifford and I are agreed that the trip shall be taken. I have not had a chance yet to tell Uncle Dick. Of course, he knows that you are to be married soon. I do wish he could go with me, but that is out of the question.

"I mean to bring Hallie back with me if such a thing is possible, and I have reason to believe it will be when I once see her.

"I do wish you could see our lawn now. If you only could you surely would want to be married right in the midst of our roses. We have over thirty different kinds. They are simply beautiful.

"Clifford is calling to me so I must stop. Good-night, my dear. Tell Hallie I am waiting for her letter.

"Lots of love from

"MABEL."

CHAPTER XXI

HER CUP RUNNETH OVER

THE morning of June 17th dawned bright and clear. Willa was as busy as a bee gathering flowers for nearly every room. It was her seventh birthday, and to her a birthday seemed almost as good as Christmas. This year, however, something happened to make her feel the day was better than any day she had ever known; and, more than that, that she had the best grandpa and grandma a little girl ever had.

After Willa had arranged the flowers to the best of her ability, her father and mother took her for a drive, during which time, as though accidentally, the Doctor reined Nell up toward the station, and past the freight-house.

"O—O! Look! Papa, mama, look!" screamed Willa.

Her appeal to "look" was not needed by them, for this was what they had been doing ever since they came in sight of the place.

"O! O! O! Let me out papa, let me out!" cried the child in ecstasy.

The cause of all this clamor on her part was the sight of Si harnessing into a little dog-cart a cream colored pony with heavy mane and tail.

"O! O!" from time to time seemed all the child

could say. She scrambled out before her father could get the wheels cramped, and ran straight to the pony.

"Look out for her, Si. See he doesn't nip her," cautioned the Doctor, but Trix, the new arrival, only put his head down for Willa to pat him.

"Weren't they good to send him?" said Margaret, "but that is just like father, anyway."

Mr. Holway had written a few days before about this "rig-out" being for sale, telling them that he was going to send it to Willa for a birthday present; and the day before a wire had reached the Doctor, carrying the one word, "Shipped." Consequently, they were prepared.

"Look at her. Do you suppose there is a happier child living than she is this minute?" asked the Doctor, as Si and Willa climbed into the cart.

Another spectator of the scene had been little red headed, freckled faced Jimmy Tucker, who, when convinced that this wonder of wonders really belonged to Willa, ran home as fast as his short, fat legs could carry him. When near the house, he roused them all by shouting, "Mama, grandma, —Alice, mama, grandma," all the way through the yard and up the steps. Within the doors he ran from one to the other, again calling all the names he could think of, accompanied by a "Come, come, Willa, pony, lookout, come—quick."

His message delivered, he again ran out to follow the pony, the cart, their owner, and Si; for these had led the way, and the Doctor and his wife

kept behind. Like Jimmie, they found the sight interesting. When in their own yard, Willa insisted on her mother's joining her and driving down to see Hannah, who was already on her piazza, holding little Joseph in her arms, watching Willa jouncing up and down, laughing, talking, and swinging the reins at the same time. Some of her happiness must necessarily be worked off, for she could not hold it all. Willa's longing had at last been realized. Never had she forgotten the ponies she had seen at a circus two years before; and never had she gotten over wishing for one.

To Willa's delight, Hannah was full of appreciation, although no more so than Baby Joe, now a year old, who had to reach out his chubby hand to pat the pony, with a "Ugh, ugh," until Willa had to jump out in order to be nearer the scene of action, and to talk to Baby Joe himself. While she was doing this, her mother discovered that Jimmie Tucker was swinging himself on the back of the cart.

"Why, Jimmie! Where did you come from?" she called.

"I seen him first," was Jimmie's blunt reply, as he dug his bare toes into the ground under him.

"Seen who?" she asked.

"The pony. I seen him 'fore Si got him off the train," proudly answered Jimmie, feeling himself quite a hero.

"O, Jimmie, come here," called Willa. "Isn't he pretty?" she asked.

Jimmie did not need a second invitation; he was soon beside Willa, and said, longingly, as he looked at Trix, "I—wish—he's—mine. When—I—get *big*, I'll hev one."

"Never mind, Jimmie. We'll give you a ride home, won't we, mama?" Willa said, soothingly.

"Of course. Come, get in, both of you," her mother answered, cheerily.

Jimmie's face at that moment was all the pay Mrs. Warren needed. She never forgot the expression it wore, which, as she told the Doctor afterward, reminded her of a freshly opened sunflower; and Jimmie never forgot the ride.

Before Willa went to bed that night she had to write a letter of thanks to grandpa and grandma. Faithfully she labored over this all important letter. At last she carried the following to her mother for approval:

Dear Grandpa and Grandma: I think you are the very niseest foxes a little girl ever hed I wish I could see you. Trix is a darlin he took mama an me to ride and then he took papa but i went to. I have to go coz hes mind. I thanks you milluns an milluns lots of love an hear are your kises.

* * * * *

WILLA.

Com up an see me.

The letter was sent just as written and was treasured by grandpa and grandma, who felt that they loved the child as though she were their own.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR ALL TIME

“**Y**OU take Emily May to be your lawful wedded wife, and do here promise to love, honor, and cherish her in sickness and health—”

“I do,” came the answer in the strong, clear tones of Henry V. Livermore, M. D.; and the same response came from Emily May, when a similar question had been asked of her.

Their plans for the wedding had been changed entirely, after Mabel's arrival. Instead of either Mrs. Holway's or Mr. Livermore's invitations being accepted, it was decided that the marriage should take place at their own home, which had been a scene of excitement for the last few weeks. Only relatives and the Holways were present; but later, on the lawn, a reception was held, and it seemed that all Canton marched in through one gate, past the receiving line, the table of refreshments, and out of the other. Surely no present pupil, and no young man or woman who had been numbered among the High School pupils during the past four years, failed to be present if such a thing was possible.

The bride looked as most brides look, only more beautiful, because at that time she was the last in Canton. All loved her, and love alone will

make even a plain face beautiful, but Emily's had too regular features and too clear a complexion to be considered plain. She had always been called pretty, but to-night she looked beautiful, in the high, the true sense. From the time she entered the room to the notes of Lohengrin, all eyes were on her, and none gazed more earnestly than Henry's father. Over and over again he said to himself, "Emily Livermore, Emily Livermore, Little Em, Little Sister, Emily, Emily." The name was the same, and that surely comforted him. His Emily had been light; this one was dark, but she was "Emily Livermore" for all that. The old man was happy, or as nearly so as he was ever likely to be unless—no, no. He dared not think of it. When the bulk of the guests had gone, Emily went up the stairs to don her traveling gown, for they were to spend four days at Niagara. In saying "good-by" the old man patted her on the shoulder with the words, "Little Emily, our Emily," and then he kissed her.

"You'll stop at home on your way back?" he asked, eagerly.

"We'll stop, father," said Henry and Emily together.

The only regret expressed by those present was that the Warren family could not be there, but Mabel and Hallie, who were to remain at the house while the bride and groom were gone, were to start on their return for the town of Woodrow. Mabel, from experience, and Hallie, from intui-

tion, felt that the newly-married couple should get used to their home life together without the presence of even sisters who loved them both.

Hallie was fast making preparations toward accompanying Mabel to California, and with that intention had sent in her resignation as teacher. The trustees, however, voted on a year's leave of absence, thus giving her an opportunity to return if she wished. Sometimes the two were busy working on Hallie's clothes; sometimes putting different rooms in order. The wedding presents, however, were in a room by themselves, and were left for Emily and Henry to arrange and acknowledge as they should see fit, after their return. Among these presents, nothing had pleased Emily more than a clock that had come in the Warren box, bearing Willa's card written in her own childish hand. The clock itself spoke of the giver, for the long pendulum which measured the seconds, the minutes, the hours consisted of a suspended swing in which sat a rosy cheeked, curly haired girl; and neither Emily or the Doctor could look at it and not think of their little friend, Willa.

Another that had attracted Emily's attention was a large oil painting, a landscape portraying a scene on a country road in Henry's home town, and a card with the name, "Madaline Lamson."

"Who is that, Henry? No one I know," said Emily, passing the card to him. He was not surprised. He had seen the wrappings taken from the painting, and knew at once from whom it came.

"No, you do not know her," he answered, "but I will tell you frankly that she is the one who, as a High School boy and a College boy I hoped sometime to ask to marry me. She was a fine girl and all right; and I thought the feeling I had for her was love, until—until I saw you, Emily, and—and you know the rest, don't you?"

"The rest, yes, but—I—didn't—"

"No, dear. We were never engaged, I am thankful to say, but so long as this has come," he said, pointing to the picture, "I wanted you to know the truth about it."

"Thanks, Henry. I'd like to know her. If you liked her, I am sure I would like her, too."

"Perhaps sometime you may, but I think it doubtful. I heard a few weeks ago that she was engaged to a man in the West and was to be married soon."

"O!" said Emily. "Well, we will write her a note of thanks to show her that we appreciate this, and then we will send her something when her time comes, won't we?" she asked.

"Just as you say, dear," answered Henry.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE HEART AND ONE MIND

” **M**Y DEAR, DEAR CLIFFORD:
“I think I should be perfectly happy if you were only here. You can’t know how much I miss you.

“We are at Margaret’s. Hallie and I came on the noon train yesterday. Started from Canton almost as soon as Em and Henry got home. They certainly make a dandy couple, but you have heard so much of them, the wedding and the house that now you will want to know about Margaret, the Doctor, and Willa.

“If Henry and Em can only have as happy a married life as Margaret and Hunt have had, it will be blessed, indeed, and there is no reason why they can’t have it if they only keep level heads on them, and keep their hearts right.

“Margaret and Hunt are so happy together that I do believe they grow younger each year. Willa seems the only one getting older, and three years in a child certainly make a big difference. She is just a darling. I cannot look at her without in thought going ahead a few years, and thinking what may be in store for us. You cannot know how I want to see you, Clifford.

“I shall go back to Em’s next week, and the week after start for home. Of course, I would not

have this trip taken out of my life for anything, but there is no place like 'home' Clifford, no matter where it is nor how humble it is.

"Willa is out now giving Hallie a ride in her pony-cart. Willa drives the pony herself and she can very nearly harness. I wish you could see them. Hallie brought her camera and we shall have a lot of pictures to show you when we get there. She took one last night of Willa on her pony's back; and in front of her sat Si's baby, a little over a year old. They did look too dear for anything.

"I forgot to tell you how well the Doctor and Margaret have gotten along financially. There are other doctors now, but Hunt is the leading one for miles around. If there is a serious case in any of the other towns, he is sent for. I am so glad for them both.

"Margaret is beginning to have a few gray hairs, but they don't seem to make her look a day older. I suppose it is because the old-fashioned fun in her is bubbling up underneath just the same as ever.

"I must stop, for Margaret is calling me. We are all going for a ride. Hunt bought a two seated carriage this summer, and he wants us to sample it.

"Good-by, dear. You know that I am just waiting to be with you again, don't you?

"Give my love to Uncle Dick, auntie and Fred. I hope they are taking good care of you. Tell

them if they don't I shall never forgive them.

"Good-by, again, and heaps of love from
"MABE."

After sealing and stamping the letter, Mabel put it in her bag intending to post while they should be out.

By the time she had gotten down stairs, Hallie and Willa had Trix in his stall, and were already on the rear seat of the carriage, in anticipation of the longer ride with the others. Nell was on the right of the pole, and "Pete," her mate, on the left. The two looked almost exactly alike, with the exception that the "dapples" as Willa called them on Nell shaded a dark brown, and those on Pete a light one. As Si hooked the tugs and hold-backs, and slipped the reins through the saddle rings, Nell and Pete first caressed and then nipped each other in childlike play.

Margaret insisted that Mabel ride on the front seat with the Doctor, in order to get a better view of the places of interest which she had learned to know on her other visits; and she herself joined Willa and Hallie on the back seat.

After driving to the post office and mailing her letter, Mabel noticed to her delight that the Doctor headed the horses toward the Munson Road, about which she had often told Hallie, when comparing it with Canton drives. The Doctor had previously planned to take in "the square," going by way of the road named above, past the Jewell

Lake, and out over the Graham Road. It was a glorious day, and over two hours were spent in covering the ground and admiring the scenery. The Doctor had driven slowly on Mabel's account, lest she grow overtired, but on her return, with face burned by the afternoon sun, she forgot all fatigue in finding a letter from Clifford, remailed from Canton. She hurried to her room, slipped off her shoes, and after building her a back with pillows and cushions, climbed on the bed to read the letter from the one she loved better than anyone else in all the wide world. It read:

“Sunday evening.

“MY DEAR LITTLE MABE:

“I am well. Don't worry about me. I am just a little blue, that's all. I have been over to the house to-day. The folks didn't want me to go, but I wanted to see if Jim was tending the lawn as he ought, and if everything inside was all right. And, Mabe, I never knew before a house could look so bare, so forsaken, without a woman in it. There was every single room just as we had had it, when it seemed so full of cheer, and to-day, I felt there had been a funeral there. I saw then, dear, as never before, that it is not the building nor the things in it that makes the place 'home' to me, but you, Mabe, and I know now that wherever you were, in a hut or a palace, that place would be 'home' to me. You understand, don't you?

“The only comfort I have when I think of those

years apart, is that you could or would not have come to me just so long as your mother needed you.

"You have been gone six weeks now, and they seem longer than any six years in the past. O, what haven't these three years together done for us! We know each other now, and we only thought we knew before. What a difference it makes, doesn't it, dear?

"Three weeks more and you will be home. Be careful of yourself and do not get too tired. Good night, my dear, and God bless you! I never used to pray much. I didn't feel like it until I lived with you, but now I don't believe one waking hour passes when I do not ask God to care for you and to bring you back safely to me.

"Again, good night, and all the love a man could possibly know for a woman, from

"CLIFFORD."

Mabel read and re-read the letter. She rearranged the pillows and leaned back, still holding the pages that had put new life and love in her veins, and there Hallie found her an hour later fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

WELCOME NEWS

THE wind seemed to creep through every crevice of the old house. The sound of drifting snow could be heard on every window pane and no path, no track could be seen outside. The cat, rolled up on the rug in front of the open fire, seemed the only unconcerned creature around. Rover, the dog, went from the front kitchen door to the back wagging his tail. He seemed to know that something was wrong; that something disturbed his mistress. Emily Livermore went from window to window peering out; for she had the shades all up in order to light the roadway for those outside. It was the first blizzard of the season, and the only terrible one since she had come to Canton.

"Do you think, father, there is danger of Henry's getting stuck in the drifts? Do you, really?" she asked anxiously, stopping by the chair of Henry's father, who was there spending a few weeks with them, and laying her hand on his shoulder.

"I don't know, Em," answered the old man, gently placing his hand over hers, and shaking his head. "It all depends on his horse."

"O, Ned is all right, but the road is all filled in. I can't see even a track," she answered, "and there is a drift that half covers my bed-room window.

Just come in and see it."

To please her, the old man followed; and, as he looked, he said: "It's an old timer, an old timer."

"I don't know what to do! Do you suppose I ought to let Rover out? Wouldn't he be likely to find them if they were lost? I have read of such things," said Emily.

"No, no, keep him in, so far as Henry is concerned. If the horse is any good, he'll keep to the road whether Henry can see to rein him or not. A horse is a wonderful animal, a horse is, knows more'n men do in a storm like this. Henry put on his cloth overcoat under his fur one, didn't he?" asked the old man, anxiously.

"Yes, and I didn't let him know it, but I wrapped up two hot bricks besides the soapstone, and tucked them into the pung before he drove out of the shed, and his robes are heavy. If I could only know!" she said, "But perhaps he is still over to Mrs. Miller's. We don't know how sick he found her. Rover acts awfully nervous. It wouldn't do any harm to let him out, would it? Dogs know as much as horses, don't they?"

"Well, let him out. It can't do any harm. We'll see which way he goes."

As Emily started for the door, Rover began stepping around and wagging his tail, ready to bound out as soon as the door should open. He was a beautiful two-year-old St. Bernard with which Uncle Dick had emphasized a hundred dol-

lar check on Emily's wedding day, hence his name "Rover," a symbol of his travels. So tensely had he wedged his way into the hearts of his owners that they now looked on him as a part of their "stock in trade," and he was perfectly devoted to them.

When out, he snuffed around the door, and then started off in the direction the team had taken.

"Rove's gone," said Emily. "I wonder if he will find Henry."

"You bet. He'll never be back till he does, unless he finds someone else who needs help. That's the nature of him," answered Mr. Livermore.

"It is quarter past nine, now. I mean to see how long he will be gone," said Emily, who still kept up her watching, although only once did she hear the sound of bells, and they came from a heavy team that passed.

First Mr. Livermore and then Emily added wood to the open fire; besides which there was a big fire in the furnace. Although Emily felt that never in her life had she seen a storm like this, she tried to console herself by thinking that perhaps this seemed worse because one she loved was, or might be, in the midst of it. She had a hot drink and a hot supper ready in case Henry should come; but the hands of the clock rolled slowly around, and nobody came, neither was any sound heard save the hard beating of snow against the build-ings.

"Father, you needn't stay up if you are tired,"

she said, at last. "I won't be afraid so long as I know you are in the house."

"No, no, I'm all right, Emily. Perhaps he'll be here pretty soon."

Emily saw that the speaker was growing more anxious than he cared to say, and thinking to get his mind on something else, said:

"Let's have a game of checkers while we wait. We can make those men jump around, if the ones outside can't," she said, laughingly, as she brought out the black and red checked board which stood for one of the old man's favorite games. This indeed helped to entertain him, although both were on the alert every moment. Between every game, and often in the midst of one, Emily ran to peer out the window.

Ten o'clock came, eleven, and twelve, and then they heard a bark. Rover was at the door. In an instant Emily was there. The faithful fellow came in, went to both, wagged his tail, and lay down beside the cat, which waked as some of the cold snow from Rover fell on her head. Emily watched him. In an instant, she saw securely bound to the dog's collar, with a red string, a tiny package wrapped up in one of Henry's rubber gloves which he always carried in his bag. She caught her scissors from her sewing basket and cut the several threads holding it. Then she almost breathlessly pulled out the crumpled piece of paper on which in Henry's "dreadful scrawling," as she always called it, she found the words:

"Don't worry. Am all right. Had to stop at Jones's. Harry broke leg. Won't be home till morning.

"HENRY."

Somehow, the words did not look "scrawly" tonight; they looked beautiful to her, so beautiful that she raised the paper to her lips and kissed them.

"O, father, listen," she cried. The note was read to him, and then she said, "I'm so glad, but wasn't he a dear to send it?"

As she spoke the last words, she thought of Rover; and, kneeling beside him saw that he was completely tired out. He lay stretched full length, his eyes closed, and his tongue half out of his mouth. Rover was her pet. It was Rover who had brought her the good news from Henry. Rover should have his share of the credit. What could she do for him? She thought a moment and then flew to the kitchen, coming back with a dish of hot milk, into which pepper, salt and broken pieces of bread had found their way. With a little coaxing Emily succeeded in getting him up to eat; in a few minutes he seemed to feel better, shook himself, walked around the room, and then back to his old place. There Emily left him when they went to bed, and left near him the dish filled almost to the brim with milk.

Although she went to bed, she did not find sleep until after the clock struck three in the morn-

ing, when, to her amusement afterward, she dreamed of summer time and flowers. Shortly after seven, she was wakened by the sound of men's voices and heavy bells. The snow-plow was out with its full force of men and horses. Emily soon found that Mr. Livermore was also up; had rebuilt the open fire to add as much cheer to the place as possible; and also had the teakettle boiling, preparatory to breakfast. Rover was his old self again. They needed only Henry, now, to make the circle complete.

They had scarcely finished breakfast, when Rover started for the door and barked. This time his mistress opened it without a question, and watched him bound down the road. In less than an hour she heard the sound of their own bells, and in a few minutes saw Henry drive into the yard with Rover in the pung beside him.

Emily, foreseeing the difficulty Henry would find on reaching home, and knowing how tired he would be, had called to one of the men handling the plow, and through him had gotten two other men to shovel their own driveway, as well as in front of the barn and shed.

Throwing a cape over her shoulders, she ran out to meet her husband.

"Well, little girl," he said as he kissed her.

"I'm so glad you've come! But do tell me how you found Rover last night," she said, anxiously.

"Got on your overshoes?" he asked, instead of answering her question.

"Yes, they are on, and I won't take cold," she said, drawing the hood over her head. "Tell me where you found him, Henry."

"O, down here about two miles. Was on my way back from Mrs. Miller's—Jones, there, was stuck in the snow—lost the road. Rove found him, and knowing the team was coming, stuck to him until he could call me. Their boy broke his leg."

"You said 'broken leg' in the note," said Emily.

"Everyone scared of the storm, couldn't get a team anywhere, and he started afoot for me," explained Henry as he unloosened the horse and led him into the stable.

"Don't come any further, Em," he continued. It isn't shoveled good, here. I'll be in in a minute. Better run in and I'll tell you the rest there. How's father?"

"All right," answered Emily, "and I was so glad he was here," she called back.

While Henry ate his breakfast,—the second one for the morning, although more appetizing than his previous one, Emily heard the rest of the story.

"I wouldn't have slept a wink if it hadn't have been for Rover and the note," she said.

"I felt last night, Rove was worth his weight in gold," he answered. "I knew he would come straight home, and then you wouldn't worry. I had feared before that you might be wishing you had never married a doctor," he added playfully.

"If I hadn't married you I would never have married anybody," she answered, emphatically, go-

ing around to the chair he had pushed back and climbing into his lap.

"Hear her, father? Do you suppose she means it?" he asked, roguishly.

"I think she does. Emily is Emily, and means what she says, you know," answered the old man rather seriously, Emily thought, but Henry understood.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LITTLE STRANGER

ONE of Willa's delights was to go to the postoffice for the mail. At first her mother had insisted on her carrying a small bag for that purpose, but now Miss Willa felt she was big enough to carry it "like papa," and she did. The postmaster and his wife, as well as many of the townspeople who invariably gathered there at the same hours, expected to see little "Red Riding Hood," as they called her, come marching in. The child wore a little red coat coming to the bottom of her dress, and a red velvet hood. A white lamb's wool collar and muff added to these made Willa present a picture fair enough to cheer any tired heart.

One cold winter's Saturday, the Doctor was called on a trip which took him past the office. Willa rode there with him, ran in for the mail, let him look over the addresses, and then started home with it in a hurry, as he had said, "A letter from Aunt Mabel, I guess."

"O, won't mama be pleased? She was wishing this morning for one. Good-by," said Willa as she kissed him; and then she wiped her face, for his mustache was frosty, but Willa didn't care. Papa was papa, and she couldn't leave him, even for a few hours, without her "good-by" kiss.

"Mama, mama, one from Auntie Mabel, one from Auntie Mabel," shouted Willa, rushing into the house, her cheeks almost the color of her coat and hood.

"Papa said so," she added, picking out the right one.

"No, from Hallie," answered Mrs. Warren as soon as she saw the writing.

"O, about the baby, quick," cried Willa, taking off her furs, hood and coat as rapidly as possible.

Willa's love for "Auntie Mabel," Hallie, and the new baby the post card had told about made her have her full share of interest in the contents of the letter; but Willa had been brought up a lady, and she now took her little chair and placed it beside her mother's, looking up at her expectantly, hopefully, and yet silently until her mother had finished reading:

"DEAR MARGARET:—

"As you already know by my post card, Richard Warren Irving arrived safe and sound on New Year's eve. Mabel has been at me to write to you for a week, but every day seems so full I haven't got to it before. Both she and the baby are doing finely. She sat up to-day for the first time, but she did not stay long.

"I do wish you could see the youngster. He weighed eight and a half pounds, and has gained eight ounces already, but he ought to gain for he eats like a little pig.

"His hair is light like Clifford's and was long enough to part and comb around. I just drew off an outline of his little hand, and will put it in the letter for Willa to see.

"Speaking of his weight I shall have to tell you about two old ladies who came in the other day to see him. They did not come together, but their calls happened to overlap, and they were here at the same time. When they were told how much he weighed, one piped up in a most rasping tone, and said, 'Do you know, when I was born they said I weighed only a pound and a half, and my mother's wedding ring went clean up to my shoulder.'

"The other one evidently did not mean to be eclipsed, and she said, proudly, 'Well, I beat that. I only weighed fifteen ounces, and they said, course I don't remember it, but they said the doctor took me and lowered me into a new coffee pot that sat on the table, and the cover went down.'

" 'For the land sakes!' exclaimed the first one. 'And did you *live*?'

" 'Why, they *said* I did, and that I grew nicely,' the other answered, soberly.

"They were both in dead earnest, and honest, Margaret, I thought I should explode, but Mabel gave me a look that made me put the check rein on for then, although ever since I haven't been able to think of it without laughing.

"I truly do not know which is the happier, Mabel or Clifford. If ever a man hated to start for business mornings, he does. I wish I could step

in some day to see Em and Henry. If they are half so happy as you and Hunt and Mabel and Clifford, I fear I should begin to wish that my 'affa-ni-ty' as I call him would come. I haven't seen him yet, though. I am dead sure of that. I guess mine must have died when he was a little fellow, and if so, I am doomed for 'old-maid-hood,' for I never, never will marry a man that I do not care anything about, and they are the only ones that have come along yet. Em used to say that I was too 'futhy' as she called it, but I think it is something to be fussy about, don't you?

"Mabel's home is just a dream of a place. Here it is January, and I wish you could see their lawn. It would make you forget all about the snow drifts that you must be having there by this time.

"Uncle Dick is a darling. He grows better and better every time I see him. It seems so strange now to have him a real live uncle, so full of fun, and so lovely, when all my life he has seemed just some kind of a second hand relation that I could only hear about and never see.

"I hear the baby calling. He doesn't say 'auntie' yet, but something else that is just as emphatic. Mabel will write just as soon as she is able.

"Lots of love to you all, from

"HALLIE."

Mrs. Warren had, silently, during this reading slipped the little paper hand over to Willa who took it with a little, "O—O—o" under her breath, after

which she placed it over and under each of her own plump hands and tried to decide from which hand of the baby's it came, until her mother had reached the end, when she turned to Willa, ready to answer the dozen or more questions that were likely to come thick and fast.

The Doctor returned and the letter had to be read to him. After laughing over some parts of it, and talking seriously over others, Mrs. Warren said:

"I am so glad. Mabel earned all the happiness that can come to her."

"And Hallie is no easy mark, either," answered the Doctor. "There is a whole lot to that girl, after all."

"I know it, and she was such a little flyaway! Father always loved her; in fact, he was about the only father the girl ever knew," replied Mrs. Warren. "I remember one Sunday afternoon she had gotten her mother's consent to come over for just one hour, and I can see father now," she said laughing. "He had Hallie up on his lap, and she parted his hair in the middle, braided each side of the front; then she braided his whiskers in several strands and tied her doll's ribbons on the different braids. She was up to something all the time."

"How old was she then, mama?" asked Willa, excitedly.

"About six, I guess."

"You haven't any whiskers, but I wouldn't braid

them if you had," said Willa seriously, climbing up in her father's lap.

"You wouldn't?" he answered, laughing, and putting his arm around her.

"N-o. You are my papa, and you wouldn't look like a man then," she said, nodding her head and drawing her lips together tightly, as though she had settled the question for all time.

CHAPTER XXVI

TAKING ROOT IN NEW SOIL

S EVEN years have passed. Willa is no longer a tiny girl in the Woodrow school, but a pupil in the High School at Ripley. Dr. and Mrs. Warren are next door neighbors to Mr. and Mrs. Holway.

The question of leaving Woodrow had been a big one to them, and one that was long considered before a final decision was reached; and when it did come, it was made on Willa's account. They felt that she could not be spared from the home. If she must leave in order to enter another school, they would leave, too; and all this was strengthened by the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Holway were no longer young, and more and more they urged the coming of their children to the old home town.

The change had at last been effected, and all were glad. The Doctor's name was already so well known in Ripley that his practice from the first was large, and much less wearing, as many long, hard drives were saved. Nevertheless, the time never came when he was not glad for his stay in Woodrow and all that it had done for him.

Si and Hannah had remained in Woodrow; and more than that, Si had established a business for himself. One of the Doctor's horses had in some way in the past contracted a spavin, and Si, in his

treatment of it, had accidentally discovered a remedy. The remedy had been tried so effectively on not only the Doctor's horse, but neighbors' horses as well that the idea occurred to Hannah one day that Si might add to his income by the general sale of it. This idea stuck, when once in Si's mind; for he had ambitions as well as other men. He had not only Joseph, now eight years old, but Lawrence four, and Si meant that they should have their chance when the right time should come. With Dr. Warren's consent, he had gone to work in his spare time, and Hannah worked in hers. Before long, even Joe was able to put labels on some of the bottles, not very rapidly at first, but improving each day. A mail order business had been established, and the three were kept busy.

At the time of Dr. Warren's leaving Woodrow, Si bought his place, made a good sized payment, and gave his notes for the balance.

Trix could neither be sold or taken; hence it was agreed that he should be left at the old place, and that little Joe and Lawrence should drive him. Willa was getting too old for him now, and none could bear the thought of his going among strangers.

Before many months passed, Si had had to hire a man, and before the year closed, some other extra help. A part of his old house served for factory, and if business continued to improve at the present rate of progress, the whole house would eventually be needed for that purpose.

Willa, after the move was made, enjoyed two homes. Grandma and grandpa were so near that the hours out of school were generally divided between the two places; in fact, they seemed like one family.

It had taken Mr. and Mrs. Holway a few weeks to grow accustomed to thinking of this girl, now almost as tall as Margaret, as their little Willa. Her father and mother had seen the changes come so gradually that they had scarcely been conscious of them, but with Mr. and Mrs. Holway it was different. The last two years had indeed wrought a great change in her, and nothing seemed to change her more in their mind than the tying together of the long curls at the back of the neck. They grieved over this, and one day to please them Willa let them loose. They were forced to admit then that she was too big for the old way, and that the change had been necessary as Margaret had said.

In school, Willa led the freshman class. In reality, for the past two years she had been ready to enter a fitting school, but Woodrow had none, and she had done much outside work with her father as tutor.

Pupils are often times jealous of a "leader" but no one was jealous of Willa. She was the pet of the school, with teachers, with boys and girls, but her popularity did not turn her head in the least. She was just Willa as she had always been.

* * * * *

"You know Mrs. Williams?" said Willa one night at dinner. "Well she is just as dear to me as she can be. I just love her, but almost every scholar there complains of her sarcasm. I do get cross with her in class the way she speaks to others, but she is good to me. Now, to-day, in rhetoric, she called on Billy Burns, and asked him a question," here Willa laughed before she could continue.

"Billy got up and said, 'Well, I don't know, but—'

"Very well, Mr. Burns. We'll have some one who does know,' Mrs. Williams said, and called on me. I answered her and answered her correctly, but, honest, I was so cross at the tone she used on Billy. There is scarcely a day when she doesn't snap up somebody, and I feel just as though she had said it to me; but, outside of class, if I see her for two minutes, I forget all about it, and love her just as well as ever."

* * * * *

And thus the time went on. The name "Willa" seemed like a password into the good graces of hearts everywhere, at home, at church, at school, at play. No good time was quite so good if Willa was not present; and nothing hard or disagreeable was quite so bad if Willa was in the midst.

Her most intimate girl friend had been chosen from among the poorer girls, a Miss Dorothy Weber from a country town nearly thirty miles from Ripley. Dorothy stood next to Willa in everything, and in some classes took an equal rank.

Whether because of this, or because of some innate quality of refinement which Willa had at once detected in Dorothy, a friendship grew up between them. Night after night Dorothy stayed with Willa. The home was always open to her; for Dr. and Mrs. Warren were pleased at Willa's choice. They knew that such companionship was good for her; besides, Dorothy's only home in the town was a boarding-house. They meant to do for this little stranger as they would wish some one to do for Willa if she were similarly situated.

"Mama," said Willa one day. "You know I do pity Dorothy, awfully. I guess her stepmother is hateful to her. Her father is good, though. He won't have her abused if he knows it, but a lot of times Dorothy doesn't tell him. It must be just awful to have to live with any mother but your very own, mustn't it? I just couldn't stand it without you, mama, I *just couldn't*," she said, putting both arms around Mrs. Warren.

For several seconds, Willa's only response was the tightening of the motherly arms around her. When the woman did dare to speak, she simply said:

"And it seems to me I couldn't stand it without you, dear."

CHAPTER XXVII

TIGHTENING THE HEART STRINGS

DURING these same seven years, changes had also come to Emily. She had become the mother of a robust, brown-eyed, brown-haired boy, now almost three years old. She and her sister, Mabel, had not seen each other since the year of Emily's marriage, but Hallie had visited her the summer before.

It scarcely need be said that the "boy" in each family seemed almost the idol of the home, so dearly was he loved; and each mother felt that she could almost see and know the child of the other, such vivid accounts and so many pictures had passed between them.

Charles Stanley Livermore certainly held an important place in the home and hearts of Henry and Emily; and also in the heart of his grandfather, for whom he was named, which honor had in a measure compensated the old man for his disappointment in not having a girl added to the family in the form of another "little Emily." Such a wonderful child, however, had the little lad proven himself to be that three or four times a year the old man had to visit him, remaining usually two or three weeks each time, except in winter when he was likely to stay longer to spare himself the lone-

liness of his own old home, which he had always insisted on keeping just as his own father had left it. During such a visit, the summer when little Stanley was three years old, Emily began taking the child to church, and a portion of the first Sunday afternoon following this experiment, she improved by writing to Mabel and Hallie:

"I have got to tell you about Stanley," she wrote. "We took him to church this morning for the first time. Henry and grandpa went, too, and at first Stanley saw so much to take up his attention that he was just as good as a child could be—just the usual wiggles out of him that are always in children, until the minister was about half through, when he assumed a deep, loud voice and cried:

"'Moses, Moses, where art thou?'

"In a moment Stanley got on his feet, leaned over the back of the pew, and twisted his head this way and that, until I put one arm around him, and the other on his skirts and whispered, 'What is it, dear?'

"'Mose. Man want Mose,' he said, soberly looking around.

"I sensed it then and thought I should scream. He said it so loud that some of those sitting near could hear, and knew at once that Stanley was looking for his cat, 'Mose.' Henry and grandpa thought that was pretty good. From that time on Stanley was restless, and continued his looking. When we came in the house and he saw Mose, he stamped

his little foot, and said:

" 'Man want Mose. Mose no come. Mose naughty kitty,' and even now he does not seem reconciled to the unfaithful attitude of poor Mose.

"Grandpa tried to read after dinner, and every little while he would burst out laughing, saying, 'Mose no come!' He certainly does love Stanley and Stanley loves him. Henry says the child is making his father over faster than anything else ever could. Yesterday it rained and you should have seen Stanley and grandpa on the stairs playing drive horse. I asked Stanley what he was doing, and he said, 'Liv'in go'cies.' Every few minutes he had to come to ask me for my order, make believe write it down, and then start back for his play team, tucking his pencil behind his ear as he sees the grocery boys do. He's a boy clear through, and I am glad of it. If there is anything I hate to see it is a sissified boy or man. I want him to be a boy, every inch of him, for the more 'boy' he is, the more of a man he will make."

A few days later, another letter read:

"Grandpa went home to-day. Stanley is so lonely that Henry has taken him off on one of his visits. If Henry isn't going where there is anything contagious, I like him to have Stanley go. It keeps him out, and it will make the two greater 'chums' when Stanley is older.

"Henry has just been chosen president of a med-

ical association that has been organized in the county. He works hard, and to my delight he is constantly growing. He has as great an aversion to getting into a rut as I always had, so we grow along together. What he reads I read.

"By the way, you remember our 'dime' box that we have kept ever since we were married? Well, we made another deposit to-day, twenty-five dollars. That makes five fifty that we have saved just in dimes toward our European trip. We are going just as soon as Stanley gets a little older. We will put enough more with it and go on our 'honeymoon' for sure. Hallie has promised to take care of Stanley when we are ready. I am so anxious for Henry to have at least six months' study in Vienna when he does go. That seems a long time to leave our baby. I expect I shall grow chicken hearted when the time comes, but I mustn't cross the bridge until I come to it; besides, so long as Stanley will be looked out for in every way, I shall feel that Henry needs me the more. Does Clifford seem to you just a great big baby boy? That is just what Henry is. Men are only boys grown big, after all, aren't they? I suppose he gets so tired and wrought up over different cases that when he comes home he wants to relax and take all the pleasure he can. No doubt some women would think it was a bother, but I never do. I like it. There is nothing that makes me happier than to see that great big tall man coming to me about all his little plans and troubles. He says I always un-

tangle them for him, but he always does that with mine, so it is only fair play after all.

"There! No more writing, dear. Here they are now—Stanley's little hands locked around Henry's arm, and both faces looking so happy. Shall have to go to them, for they'll both want 'mama' the first thing."

Thus the two sisters, so widely separated, kept constantly in touch with each other, and with the other's home life; and thus Emily and Henry constantly climbed higher and higher, all the while becoming more and more unto each other. The sunshine of each was made by being the sunshine of the other, and watching lest the smallest spark of selfishness should smoulder on their hearth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TRIO

“**I** AM just going to write to your father, and ask him if you can’t go,” said Willa.

She was talking to Dorothy shortly before the close of the spring term in their junior year. Willa had the consent of her father and mother to her little plan, which was that she, Dorothy and Amy Bradford, daughter of the cashier in the bank of which her grandfather was president, should go for two weeks and board with Hannah and Si at Woodrow.

Neither Dr. and Mrs. Warren, nor grandpa and grandma wondered that Willa wanted to see the old place and her old friends. The change would do her good and her two friends, also. Amy’s parents had gladly given their consent; for Mr. Bradford and Mr. Holway were the best of friends, and the question now was, “Could Dorothy join them?”

Arrangements had already been made with Si and Hannah who had instantly felt that a visit from Willa was all they needed to fill their cup of happiness; for business had been good, their health good, and their children good. What more could they in reason ask?

Willa kept her word, and the following letter was sent to Mr. Weber, after being sanctioned by

her father and mother :

"MR. CHARLES WEBER,
BLANKTON, MASS.

DEAR MR. WEBER: "You have never seen me, but you know me because Dorothy says she has told you all about me.

"Papa, mama, and I have a plan, but we cannot carry it out without your consent. The plan is this: I want to go back to my old home in Woodrow for a two weeks' visit, and want so very, very much, Mr. Weber, to have Dorothy and Amy Bradford, another girl friend of ours, to go with me. Mr. and Mrs. Bradford have consented, and now we just need your consent to make us a happy trio.

"It surely will do Dorothy a lot of good, and we can board with the people in our old home. The man worked for papa for years, so we know all about them. It is the dearest place. Dorothy will be my guest, you understand. I am inviting both the girls, or rather the invitation is from papa, mama, and myself. Please say 'yes', Mr. Weber, and we will promise you to take good care of her and to send her home safe and sound. Please let us know as soon as you can, because we are so anxious about it.

"Sincerely yours,

"Dorothy's friend,

"WILLA WARREN."

At the last minute, Willa insisted on having her

father's and mother's signature added to strengthen her own, and to prove to Mr. Weber, and the step-mother, too, in case she should see it, that it was the "genuine thing," as she said. She also took the precaution of addressing the envelope on her father's typewriter, because one day, when in a confidential mood Dorothy had told her that some of the letters she had sent her father had never reached him, one especially when she had asked for a little extra money at the time of the banquet the year before; and she couldn't help feeling that it had met with foul play, because, during her next vacation her stepmother had sarcastically hinted that school girls to-day thought only of spending money, and dress, dinners, and boys.

"I never had such hard work to hold in in all my life," cried Dorothy, at the time. "You know I have just enough to get along with and that is all. She plans and makes my clothes as she sees fit, and I have to wear them whether I like them or not. Father pays the school expense, of course, but for spending money! You know, Willa, how little I have! And I never go with any boys," here Dorothy had broken down. Throwing herself on Willa's couch she sobbed as though her heart would break, not because she didn't have money, not because of any one thing, but just because she had reached the end of her rope, and nothing but a good cry could make her again adjust herself to her present situation.

"Don't think of it, dear," answered Willa,

soothingly, kneeling by Dorothy and burying her own head on the pillow beside that of her friend. "It will all come right some sweet day, as I always say."

"I don't see how I ever could have lived through it all, if it hadn't have been—for—you, and your—father—and mother," Dorothy again sobbed.

"Well, we are here, and we are going to stay here, and you can just come any time you want to," Willa answered in her most comforting tone. "Father is the best father, and mother is the best mother a girl ever had. I just know they are, and I'll share them with you, Dorothy. They love you, too," added Willa.

Dorothy's only answer was the extension of her left arm encircling Willa's neck, and more sobs.

"Be brave, dear, and we'll pull together," said Willa, with as much earnestness as though she was the age of her grandmother. "You shall have a home just as long as I have one, so there!" she added.

"I'm ashamed of myself," said Dorothy, sitting up quickly, and putting both arms around Willa, "just ashamed, but—but—I couldn't help it. It—"

"Don't talk about it. Let's think of something to do. Say, mama said she would help you fix your blue dress for the social the way you wanted it. Let's go over to your room and get it. We can rip it now, and then we will get supper while mama bastes it the way it ought to go. Hooray! Come on," shouted Willa, dancing across the room and

back again.

"You are an angel and so is your mother," said Dorothy, catching her and giving her a big hug.

Thus the two girls understood each other, and thus about the matter in question Willa had known how to plan. The letter did not come for a full week. The girls were growing fearful lest an answer in the negative should come, or worse still, no answer at all. At the end of that time, Willa received the following:

"MY LITTLE GIRL'S FRIEND:

"I am willing for Dorothy to go with you. As you say, it will do her good, and I thank you and your father and mother for being so kind to her. I wish I could do more myself.

"Yours truly,

"CHARLES WEBER."

"O, goodie, good, good!" cried Willa. "Mama, look, listen," and she read the message that had made her glad, indeed.

She did not wait to see Dorothy before writing to Si and Hannah that they were surely going, and they fulfilled the promise the Monday following the close of school.

* * * * *

"By Crackers! Look at her," said Si. Then, Si, Hannah, Joseph, Lawrence, and other old friends and neighbors looked, for three young women were coming down over the car steps, and the head one,

tall, fair skinned, fair haired, with dark blue eyes, a radiantly frank face, a soulful smile, and graceful step, the one wearing a white sailor suit and jaunty girlish hat was Willa, their Willa.

The days that followed were wonderful days indeed, not only to the "trio," Hannah, Si, and the children, but to red headed, freckled faced, bashful Tommy Tucker, brother of Jimmie. He happened at that time to be helping Si Campbell get in his hay, for the greater part of Si's attention had to be given to the factory which was still booming.

Poor Tommy! He felt that three beautifully winged angels had swooped down on the village of Woodrow and landed on Si's premises. Certainly he had never seen anything like them in Woodrow before. If he saw Willa he was sure she was the most beautiful; if Amy, the most fairylike, and he constantly watched her, if he could do so without being observed, lest she spread her wings and fly away; and Dorothy? Where did she come in? Tommy felt that she was more "just girl" than either of the others, and on a few special occasions he had answered her with words other than merely "yes'm," or "no'm" which he constantly used with the others when he felt duty bound to say something. Sometimes at night Tommy would twist and turn, trying to form a mental picture of this expression or that, as he had seen it on one of their faces; and then, after wearing himself out with his fanciful day dreams, he would fall asleep, only to dream that they were all out in the field helping

him to rake Si's hay, as they had been during the day, or lounging gracefully on a load of hay while Prince and Fred hauled it into the barn. One night he wakened himself by sitting bolt upright in bed, crying, "Don't, don't, Miss Willa, you'll fall." He quickly lay back on his pillow and felt thankful that the others were so far away they could not hear him.

Neither the girls nor Si and Hannah were blind to the effect of their visit on Tommy's peace of mind.

"It's just too bad, a mean old shame," said Willa one day. The poor boy has never seen enough girls to get used to them. We must do something to let him see we are just human after all. What can it be?"

"I know. I know," cried Dorothy. "I used to play it up to Uncle Sam's. Quoit! Let's play quoit after supper.

"How? What?" cried both the others.

"O, I'll show you. I'll ask him for a horse shoe. That will do instead of a ring. It will give Tommy something to do, and he'll forget all about 'Tommy Tucker,' see if he doesn't."

And Tommy, indeed, did forget Tommy Tucker. He knew for once that he was "leader," that their playing was inferior to his, and he felt once more almost a hero; he could look at them in a different way than at any other time since their arrival. Before this, if mowing grass, and he felt a pair or two pairs of eyes on him, he wielded the

scythe for all he was worth; if raking hay, one look from them had the same effect, until all noticed it, and Si said, laughingly:

"By crackers! It's a good thing for me that you girls came. It's saved me gittin' another man, fer sure. You've made Tommy smarter than liniment ever made any horse I ever see."

"Tommy'll be all right now, you see if he isn't," Willa said after the game of quoit.

"Of course, he's all right. Never worked so well in all his life," laughed Si.

"Poor boy! It's a shame to laugh about him," said Amy, "but he is so funny I can't help it. He just needs to get some of the corners worn off, that's all."

"Well, we've worn off one," said Amy.

"And the others may go off themselves," added Willa.

CHAPTER XXIX

DOUBLE HONORS

WILLA'S graduation from the Ripley High School came on her 18th birthday. In honor of this double event there came from her parents and grandparents' a coal black saddle horse, weighing a little less than ten hundred pounds, and a beauty of a saddle, with russet trimmings and silver mountings. It was not exactly like Amy's, which she had longingly admired, but to her delight it was equally as pretty. Willa had felt when she had been assigned the valedictory that she had honor enough, but this,—she was not prepared for this; and that morning when she was called to the door to welcome the beautiful dark complexioned stranger, she stood speechless. When she did open her lips, a whole sentence in Latin poured forth, the first sentence in the valedictory, which for weeks had been serging through her brain whether awake or asleep.

When her four spectators broke into a laugh, she sank in a heap on the top step of the porch. "I—I—can't—say anything," she stammered.

"Well, well, well, what's this?" said her father, sitting down beside her.

Willa wheeled around and threw both her beautiful plump arms around his neck, and tucked her face up close to his as she used to do when a

child; the next minute she kissed him, and then flew to each of the others and treated them in the same way. Lastly, her "Black Beauty," as she called him was visited, and her head rested gently on each side of his neck and against his face. A friendship was then and there formed between them never to be broken. Before Willa was scarcely aware, Amy came galloping up, for the night before she had been told of Willa's coming surprise and asked to join them at a certain hour.

"O, he's a beauty, Willa. Isn't he a darling," she cried, leaping from her own mare, a dark bay with black mane and tail.

"Mine is the best, of course," she said, with mischief shining out through each of her big blue eyes, "but yours is next, Willa, next. Isn't that enough? You wouldn't have me go back on Mollie, would you?" she said, going to her own pet horse and putting her arms around the dappled neck, so sleek and shining.

"You know I wouldn't. Yours is just best for you because you love her, and mine is best for me, because I'm going to love him—do love him," she added, following Amy's example and encircling Beauty's neck.

"Now take a gallop, both of you," said the Doctor. "Come on," he called, stepping toward Willa, who with a leap went from her father's hand into the saddle, and away she rode, pulling rein outside the gate until Amy should join her.

The four who loved her so dearly watched the

two girls canter side by side down through their own street and out of sight. Nearly an hour passed before they heard laughter and the sound of horses' hoofs.

"O, he's the dearest, dearest horse in all the world," cried Willa. "I mean, the dearest one for me," she added roguishly, looking toward Amy.

"Well put in, and lucky for you that you thought of it," the other answered, playfully.

"Does he suit?" asked grandpa, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Suit? 'You are the best foxes a little girl ever hed,' " laughingly quoted Willa from her childish letter which had ever since been treasured by grandpa and grandma.

Afternoon came. The parts were given, and diplomas presented in the usual way. No girl there, however, carried a happier heart than Willa Warren, not merely because of the honor conferred on her, or because of her morning gift, but principally because she had of her own accord chosen to graduate in a simple, dainty white muslin rather than have her friend Dorothy, and a few other girls in like circumstances, feel that they were conspicuous because of their meagre means. Willa, weeks before, had suggested this plan to her father and mother who heartily approved, and whether that had influenced them in their decision regarding "Beauty" Willa never knew. She simply knew that she was supremely happy, that her heart held love for everybody, "good, bad, or indifferent."

The next morning nothing would satisfy her except that Dorothy should have a farewell ride on Beauty. At first Dorothy shrank from it, but rather than disappoint her friend on this their last day together, she finally let Willa lead Beauty to the steps where she mounted.

"Ride up to Amy's, do!" cried Willa, encouragingly.

The words were scarcely uttered when they heard Amy's birdlike trill and saw her waving her hand at them, as she urged Mollie on. At this time Amy and Dorothy had their first and their last ride together; for Dorothy that afternoon was to leave for the town which from force of habit she called "home," but the thought of which in reality sent a shudder through her. Her school days were over, and thus far, she had dared not think of what might be ahead of her.

The two girls cantered through street after street of Ripley.

"Do you mind going down Main street?" asked Amy. "I want to stop at the bank to see papa."

"Anywhere," answered Dorothy. "I'm sort of a passenger, you know."

Beauty and Mollie kept side by side. Every now and then they looked toward each other and made believe nip.

"Look at them. They'll just love each other before long. See if they don't," said Amy, as she drew up to the bank, dismounted, and ran in to see her father. Her errand was short. In less than

three minutes she was back, accompanied by Mr. Bradford, who helped his daughter mount, shook hands with Dorothy, and complimented her on her class history of the day before.

"Who was that young man that came out just as you went in?" asked Dorothy, when she and Amy were again on their way.

"Who? What did he look like?" asked Amy, thoughtfully.

"Tall, dark, clean—good looking," answered Dorothy, briefly.

"O, I know,—Rob Emmons. He's clerk there. Why?"

"Nothing, only I thought he knew Beauty, he looked at him so hard, and seemed surprised to see me on him."

"Probably he was surprised. Father says he's Mr. Holway's right hand man. He has had him promoted two or three times already, and," here she rode a little closer and lowered her voice, "don't you say a word to Willa, but more than likely he was surprised to see you on Beauty. Willa has never mentioned him to me, but different times when she and I have been in there together, and he has had to come to Mr. Holway for something, the two have looked at each other as though—as though they'd like to be friends, if there wasn't such a difference between them," Amy said. "Don't ever tell, will you?"

"Tell? No. But what difference?" asked Dorothy, innocently.

“O, they’re awful poor,” said Amy, who happened to think at that moment that she better be careful how she continued on that subject, because she did not wish to cause a cloud to pass over Dorothy’s sky on this, their last day together.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE RACE

FOR years, Mr. Holway's attorney, in fact, the leading attorney of the place, was a colleague of his, and a tried and trusted friend, Col. Charles M. Longley. The lawyer, not having a son of his own—although he was the father of four daughters—had, a few years before, taken into his office a nephew, Albert Hastings, who had, much to Mr. Longley's regret, inherited many of the unpleasant characteristics of John Hastings, his father. Nevertheless, he was the son of his only sister, and he felt he owed the lad a duty.

In his uncle's office, Albert Hastings continued his studies, was admitted to the bar, made some friends, and also some enemies; for the young man did not possess the genial disposition of his distinguished uncle. Instead, he was noted for his sarcasm, criticized for his lack of tact, and for his bump of conceit which seemed over developed; and endured for the sake of his uncle, and his uncle's family. Nevertheless, the fact that he was Col. Longley's nephew, with the prospect of some day coming into an established law practice, opened the doors of the best homes in Ripley to the young man.

Hastings' chief regret with this new situation

was that his uncle should not have been childless instead of merely "sonless." Those four daughters stood as an unsurmountable obstacle preventing his ever coming into his uncle's wealth, even if he did come into his legal practice. Consequently, it was for his interest, so he reasoned, to place himself at the door of the most promising of the eligible young ladies of the town.

The year of Willa's graduation, and the year following that, Albert Hastings made a special effort to be present at all social functions where he thought she might be. He called. He sent her flowers at Christmas, and in many other ways showed her all the attention he dared.

Because of his close confinement to business he, too, had felt the need of outdoor exercise, and had purposely chosen the saddle. He was a fine rider, and no one knew it better than Albert Hastings himself. He could never resist the temptation to ride his best before any plate glass windows that he might be passing; nor to make favorable mental comments regarding himself as he did so.

Willa, however, preferred Amy for a companion on her canters. Never had she accepted an invitation from him alone, although it frequently happened, on a Saturday afternoon, that their paths crossed, at which time he was accustomed to riding with her to her own gate. Many witnesses of this little scene expressed their surmises, but in the next breath had to admit that Willa was Willa wherever she went, and certainly administered impartial

treatment to all.

Had Dr. and Mrs. Warren not felt that they knew the girl so well, they might have been somewhat alarmed at the marked attention shown Willa by Hastings. As it was, they felt confident that without a word on their part, Willa would read him and read him aright.

During all this time, no one watched more anxiously or more regretfully than Mr. Holway's assistant, Robert Emmons. No one was more conscious than he that he was not one of them, that he was left out, so to speak, from all the higher social affairs, and this knowledge made him all the more confident that Willa would be won. His crippled mother watched him anxiously. His rosy cheeks were a shade paler. His laugh was not quite so merry. His eyes grew larger, but notwithstanding all these changes, he lost none of his gentle thoughtfulness for "little mother," as he called her, nor did he neglect either his work or his studies which he had constantly pursued since leaving the High School in his junior year.

"I'm going up street," he said, soberly and yet tenderly, one cold October night.

She gave him one long, searching look, and then said:

"Very well, son. You are a man now."

"Thanks, mother," answered Robert, warmly, as he leaned over and kissed her on the forehead.

In a moment he was gone, and the old lady said to herself, "There is something on my boy's mind."

I can see it every day—have seen it for a long time,” and her brow knitted, thoughtfully. Her mind was full of thoughts concerning her boy, and anxiety lest some trouble that she could not share was weighing on him. Her mind might have been somewhat at rest had she only known that in less than a half-hour’s time, he had rung the bell at Mr. Holway’s front door.

“Why, Robert! Come in, come in,” said Mr. Holway on opening the door and seeing who his visitor was.

“Mother, this is Robert. You have heard me speak of him,” he said to his wife by way of introduction.

“I’m sure I have known ‘Robert’ for a long time,” said Mrs. Holway, kindly, as she gave the young man’s hand a warm, firm grasp.

“Sit down, sit down, boy. I’m glad to see you,” Mr. Holway said, when his wife’s greeting was over, but Robert did not sit. He stood in front of Mr. Holway, looked him straight in the eye, and said: “I’ve come on what to me is important business. Will it bother either of you if I see you alone for a few minutes?”

“No, no. Come right in here. Mother’ll excuse us, won’t you, mother?” he asked.

“Business is business,” she answered, laughing. “Go right ahead.”

Mr. Holway led Robert into an adjoining room and shut the door. When both were seated, the elderly man said, in his kindly tone that Robert had

so often heard, "Well?"

Robert knew what that one word meant, and he said at once:

"Mr. Holway, next to my mother, I look on you as the best friend I have in all the world. It is for that reason that I am here."

"Thanks, Robert. I *am* your friend, and I am glad that you feel it. What can I do for you?"

"What are my chances for the future?" asked Robert, bluntly.

"The very best, if you'll stick to the wheel," came the frank, earnest reply.

"Good! I'll stick. Another question," the young man answered.

"Go ahead," urged his listener.

"I'm poor. What I know and what I have done has come from hard work. I'm not in the 'swim' as the fellows say," continued Robert.

"And some of the 'swimmers' will never see land, but *you* will, see if you don't," answered Mr. Holway, heartily.

"But, Mr. Holway, you don't understand. I love Willa Warren," the young man said.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the old man. "Excuse me, Robert, excuse me. I was just surprised, that was all."

"I would not be mean enough to seek a further acquaintanceship with her, or even to try to win her love, unless you and her people were willing. I have come to you first, because I know you best."

The young man paused, still looking straight in-

to the eyes of the other. "In case it is *possible* for me to win her love, *would you be willing?*" he continued, eagerly, almost madly, putting emphasis on every word.

"Yes," came in the calm, even tone of Mr. Holway.

"Thanks, with all my heart," said Robert, rising.

"Sit down, sit down, wait. One thing I would suggest or advise."

"Yes?" said Robert, quiringly.

"That you wait until after her twenty-first birthday," added Mr. Holway.

Robert buried his face in his two hands. After that he did not move a muscle until the other's voice brought him to himself by saying:

"I mention this because I know it is what Dr. and Mrs. Warren would say if either of us were to ask them."

"But Hastings," said Robert, with a curl of his lip and fire in his eyes.

"Time will tell, of course. I will just let you know this much, though, that no man shall have Willa's promise to marry him until after she is twenty-one. Isn't that enough?"

"But—supposing—she—learns to—to like him? He's—he's—"

Robert was going to add, "He's mean enough for anything," but checked himself and added, boldly, "I love her so, Mr. Holway."

Again Robert rose to go, and this time Mr. Holway rose, too.

"You've shown yourself one man in a hundred, Robert; yes, in a thousand, I guess. You've shown an honor that some fellows don't have only in their dictionary," said the old man, laying a hand on each of Robert's shoulders and looking straight into his young, frank, manly face. "Good luck to you, boy. I'm with you," he added, heartily, shaking the young man's hand.

"I am glad I trusted you. You have done me good," answered Robert, returning the friendly grip.

Thus the two parted, and although Dr. and Mrs. Warren were told of the interview, no word was mentioned to Willa; in fact, the four purposely avoided mentioning the name of Robert Emmons. They chose to let common sense and love work out their own courses.

CHAPTER XXXI

CHRISTMAS AT GRANDPA'S

"**I** FEEL as though we ought to go, Henry," said Emily, after reading grandpa's letter. "You know the last time he was here, how changed he seemed, and how he had failed."

"I know," answered her husband, "but he is not so feeble that he can't travel, and some of the cases here need me more than usual."

"Well, it isn't as though there was no other doctor in the place, Henry. If the worst comes, your patients can go to them, as theirs have come to you a lot of times," pleaded Emily in Grandpa Livermore's behalf, feeling a strange sympathy for the old man who positively refused this year to leave the old place as the holiday season approached.

"All right. Tell him we'll come," he answered. "I never could stay away at Christmas when mother was alive, but it is all so different now. It isn't much fun for me, but I mustn't think of myself. It is father, poor father!" he added, with new feeling.

Emily wrote. The three went. Stanley seemed the only one who felt the genuine Christmas spirit. Somehow his father and mother felt more as though they were attending a funeral, so changed was the old man. No one but Stanley seemed able

to bring him to himself for brief periods at a time. With the boy, however, he would laugh his own old-fashioned laugh, would tell stories of past Christmas scenes and experiences, but as soon as Stanley left him he seemed like one dreaming; he would walk around from room to room with eyes so blank that to Henry and Emily it seemed as though they saw nothing except the light to guide him lest he stumble against the various pieces of old-fashioned furniture. His two old time servants understood him, his wishes, and his seemingly freakish fancies. To Henry, it was the saddest Christmas he had ever known. He and his wife both wondered what they would ever do with Stanley through these days, which seemed to bring only a phantom of Christmas cheer, were it not for the two children of Henry's boyhood friend, who lived in the very next house. Charlie and Marion had been ready with a hearty welcome for Stanley, about whom old Mr. Livermore had so often told them. They came for him to accompany them to the church to see the decorations, and the tree bearing the load that would that evening keep Santa Claus busy. During his hour's absence, Emily noticed that grandpa had ceased pacing his sitting-room, and wondered if he had lain down for his afternoon nap. She continued cracking nuts, preparatory to to-morrow's feast, until Henry came in from making a few neighborly calls.

"Where's the boy?" he asked, looking around.

"Off to the church with Charlie and Marion.

They came for him to go to see the tree and see them decorate. Their mother has something to do with it, I guess," answered Emily.

"Where's father?" he again asked, sitting down near her and taking some of the nuts to crack.

"Asleep, I think. He walked the floor a long time and then he must have lain down. Guess I better see," she said, rising a little anxiously, and going toward the sitting-room.

"He seems to sleep a lot," was Henry's mental comment.

Emily tiptoed along, making no sound on the old worn and faded velvet carpet. At the door she paused, looked at the wasted form of the old man, who was partially covered with a quilt made of fine wool pieces, in the log-cabin fashion, a Christmas present a few years before from his faithful old housekeeper. His hair was snow white; in fact, it had been almost white when Emily first saw him. Now the work of time was finished and no traces of springtide showed themselves in this field of shining, snowy softness. His face was cleanly shaven, and the high linen collar about his wrinkled throat was of pearly whiteness. The bright, pieced quilt rose and fell regularly, and Emily knew at once that its owner was enjoying a sweet, childlike sleep. As she gazed, she noticed that, clasped with the thumb and finger of each hand, both of which were resting over his chest, was a small photograph. Owing to the position, she could not see the face, but both the coloring and edges looked

old. Not daring to go nearer for fear of disturbing him, she tiptoed back to Henry and sat down on his knee.

"Sleep?" he asked, putting his arm around her.

"Yes," she whispered, and then she told him of the photograph.

"Aunt Emily, likely. Poor father!"

"He has certainly paid dearly for what he did, hasn't he?" she asked.

"Dearly? It's just haunted him all these years. I've been afraid it would effect him like this," he answered.

"I pity him, but I do not blame her," she said. "Do you suppose either of us would have given the other up for the sake of money?" she asked, scornfully.

"Not much, would we?" replied Henry, playfully raising one of her hands to his face and then kissing it.

"Money is good, but not so good as love, is it?" she asked soberly.

"*Not so good as love*, Em," Henry answered, tenderly, just as Stanley was heard on the piazza, stamping the snow from his overshoes, and leggings that came high above his knees.

"Sh! Grandpa's asleep," cautioned his mother, as he entered, but it was too late. Grandpa heard the, "O, come, the whole of us, grandpa and everybody. They've got a busting big tree, and Charlie and Marion both say pieces. It's seven o'clock. M's. Chandler said so," which came from Stanley

in a half shout and almost in one breath had aroused grandpa, who in a few minutes came strolling out, glad to see the little love scene that had been taking place between his son and daughter, and hoping it had kept them from seeing the weakness he had shown just before losing himself in sleep.

"Concert, Stanley?" he asked, with a smile, looking at his earnest, wide awake namesake.

"Yes, a big concert, an' Santa Claus, an' everything. They want us all to come, Grandpa'll go with me, won't you, grandpa?" he asked, leaning up against the old man wistfully.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE NICK OF TIME

AS Willa drove in the yard, Mrs. Warren stepped out, calling, "Don't get out, Willa. Can't you take these samples and drive down to Fowlers for more silk?"

"How many skeins?" asked Willa, reaching for the samples.

"Three of the pink and two green," answered her mother.

"All right," said Willa, tucking the delicate threads inside her purse. She turned Beauty around, for he was accustomed to either carriage or saddle, and in less than five minutes was at the place in question.

Inside the store, she noticed a commotion at her right and halted. Willa looked, and then turned to a young lady standing near, saying, "What is it? Do you know?" her tone implying real concern in the matter.

"An old lady fainted, overcome by the heat, I guess. Isn't it an awful day?" she asked.

"Why, I don't know. I thought it was beautiful. Has she come to?" asked Willa, thoughtfully.

"Yes. She didn't get 'clear off,' as we say, but she would have if Georgie hadn't gotten water for her, and someone else ran for brandy."

"Do you know who she is?" asked Willa.

"No, I don't. I never saw her before. She is all drawn out of shape with rheumatism, I guess."

"O!" exclaimed Willa, sympathetically. "I wonder if I can't take her home in my carriage. Have the man ask her, won't you?"

The girl did as requested, and in a few minutes, as soon as Willa had attended to her mother's errand, the old lady was helped into the carriage and driven home, a distance of about two miles, to a humble little cottage, partially hidden by climbing vines, where Mrs. Emmons had directed her; for her companion was none other than the mother of Robert Emmons, Mr. Holway's assistant. When they had gotten into the carriage the clerk had merely said to Willa, "Lakeville way. She'll tell you the house," and Willa thanked him. The woman had seemed so weak that Willa drove slowly, and said but little. It was not until they were nearly to the house that she learned the other's name, and when she did, she said frankly, "I am Willa Warren. You probably know my father. Everybody knows him."

"Yes, and your grandfather, too," answered the other.

"Grandpa Holway? You know him?" asked Willa, with delight.

"By name and reputation, yes. My son thinks there never was such a man," the woman answered.

"Your son? You mean that Robert Emmons is your son?" asked Willa, with interest.

"Robert Emmons is my son," the old lady answered, proudly, as Willa helped her down over the step and into the house.

"You feel better now, don't you?" said Willa, untying the ribbon bow which held an old-fashioned black summer cape to the woman's shoulders, and removed the bonnet which was likewise old-fashioned, and very, very small, although both were neatly made, and showed that they had been well cared for.

"I am so glad I happened there," said Willa. "Did you get your errands done?"

"No, I didn't. I wanted some print for a new dress, and some cloth and trimming for a nightgown. Robert gave me five dollars last night and told me to spend it for myself, but I shan't—not the whole of it," the little woman answered.

"If I only knew the kind you wanted I could get them for you. Can't you tell me? Give me some idea, can't you, so I can try?" suggested Willa.

"Bless you, dear. I've bothered you enough, now. I'll try again some day, only—I did want a best gown, and the wrappers I have now are so faded," she said.

"What color and what sized figure were you planning on for the print?" asked Willa, earnestly.

Both were seated now, the old lady in a chair, and Willa on the end of the sofa near her.

"Black and white, dear, a fine polka dot, if I can get it, if not just a little spray of something," said

Mrs. Emmons.

"And the cotton?" asked Willa.

"Fine, bleached, and some hamburg."

"How wide?"

"About so wide," the old lady answered, measuring on her finger.

"I see," said Willa. "Now I know I could get them all right and would just love to if you will only let me try. I would bring them right out to you, to-morrow."

"You must be like your grandfather, dear," replied the little woman. "Robert says he is always doing something for somebody."

"If you care to trust my judgment on the quality, Mrs. Emmons, and will tell me how much of everything, I will write them down," said Willa, taking from her bag a slip of paper and a pencil.

"Ten yards of print, black and white, you remember."

"Ten yards, yes," repeated Willa, writing.

"Black thread, number seventy," continued the old lady, and Willa again wrote.

"Five yards of fine, bleached cotton," the other added.

Willa repeated this, looking at the paper and writing.

"Two yards of hamburg. That's all—no—thread, white, number eighty," Mrs. Emmons continued. "That's all," she again added, thoughtfully.

"Now, just see if I have it right," said Willa,

reading off her list of errands.

"That's right," said her companion, gratefully. "Now, you take my five dollars, and you can bring me the change."

"No, no, Mrs. Emmons. I do not know yet how much they will be. I'll just get them, and then you can pay me when I bring them. I'll come, to-morrow," said Willa, rising.

The old lady, wholly unconscious that the young woman before her was the one who for the past three years had disturbed her son's peace of mind, said:

"You are a dear girl. I don't wonder people love you."

"Do they?" asked Willa, innocently. "Well, I love them. Everybody is always so kind to me that I have to love them," she added, taking the old lady's extended hand.

"It is you, dear, who is kind. How can I ever thank you?" she asked.

"Don't try," said Willa. "I feel like thanking you for letting me come. I think this is just a dear old place. I have passed it a lot of times, but I did not know that you lived here, or rather, that Robert lived here. I have seen him at the bank, you know," she added, frankly.

"Robert is a good lad, dear, a good lad," his mother said, tenderly.

"And *you are his mother*," slowly answered Willa, stooping over to leave a kiss on the old lady's forehead.

The tone caused the little woman to look up in time to catch on Willa's face an expression of intense loyal womanhood, coupled with the heartiest sympathy:

"You are coming again?" she asked, eagerly.

"To-morrow," answered Willa, dropping the two crippled hands. In another minute she was gone. The old lady watched her into the carriage, and answered the cheery waving of the hand that came from Willa.

* * * * *

And Willa did go again, not once, but many, many times. A fondness grew up between the two. Willa made a bright spot on the horizon of the old lady's life, and she was never able to leave the vine-covered cottage without giving her promise to return in the near future. Robert grew accustomed to returning and finding a bunch of choice roses or sweetpeas from Dr. Warren's garden adorning his mother's little table. Weeks and months passed. Willa was never there when he returned from the bank. He heard of her visit, however, and he saw the tonic like effect her presence had on his mother, and wished, how he wished, that he might be blessed in a similar way; but he remembered his promise to Mr. Holway, and he determined to keep it at any cost.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONTENTMENT

“**L**ISTEN to this, will you?” said Emily, as soon as Henry entered the room one cold afternoon in November.

“What now?” he asked, adding a few sticks of dry hard wood to the open fire before them.

“From Hallie,” she answered, putting her sewing down, and drawing from its envelope the letter just received.

“DEAREST EM, HENRY, AND STANLEY:

“We have all been over to Uncle Dick’s to-day, and I promised him that I would write you before I went to bed to-night, so here I am hard at it.

“We all agreed that it is time and past time for you to visit us. Mabel has visited you, and I have visited you, and we think now it is your turn. If you come, you can see us all. You know Uncle Dick will never go East again, but he does want to see you. Here is his check for \$100 to help toward the trip, and he says he won’t listen to any ‘no’ on your part. We are all so anxious for the three of you to come. However, if it is absolutely impossible for Henry to leave for so long, we think you and Stanley ought to come anyway. We all got so enthusiastic talking about it that we almost had you

here. Think of it! Richard is thirteen, and you haven't seen him yet. It's just a shame.

"We are all well, as you may know. I am simply tired from my day's trip, so won't write more.

"Let us know just as soon as you can. We want you here for Christmas, sure, and we will have Uncle Dick's folks over. I shall have two weeks' vacation then, anyway.

"Lots of love,

"HALLIE."

Henry, during the reading, had been seated in his big arm chair, with his feet resting on the edge of an old-fashioned settle which had belonged to Emily's mother. He did not speak until after the letter had been replaced in the envelope, and then he folded his hands behind his head, and looking straight at her, said:

"Do you want to go, Em?"

"You know I would like to," she answered, "but, under the conditions, I would be happier at home, Henry."

"You haven't told them?" he asked.

"Not a word," said Emily.

He took his hands down, again fixed the fire, and then drew his chair up close to hers.

"I want you to please yourself, Emily. You know all the conditions. Of course, I cannot go on father's account, to say nothing of my patients. When paresis gets hold of a man of his age, one doesn't know how to plan. However, I am near

enough now so that I could get there in a few hours if needed. But, about you and Stanley, it is just as you say."

"I must write them, Henry. I can't do it. I know Mabel came, but it was scarcely a parallel case, after all. Home is home, and I will wait until—until—"

She did not finish her sentence, but her listener understood, and for a full half hour he kept her hand in his as they talked over the present problem, and made plans for the future,—talked quietly, gently, like the two lovers they were, until a tap came to the door, and Mary, the maid, told the Doctor that he was wanted. Their hands separated, and he jumped up.

"Just one," said Emily.

He knew what she meant, and leaned over to leave a kiss on her lips.

Emily continued her sewing. Her face wore a smile of contentment, as she thought of the present, the future and the love that was hers. Suddenly, she heard the sound of Stanley's footsteps, and his voice saying:

"Papa home?"

"No, just gone," was Mary's brief reply, and in another moment he was in the sitting-room, followed by Nip, a genuine Boston terrier, now taking the place of the old Rover that had been killed the year before.

Stanley had scarcely greeted his mother, when his eyes lighted on the check from Uncle Dick,

which had been omitted from the envelope when the letter was replaced.

"What did he send it for, mama?" he asked, looking at it carefully.

On being told, he slapped his hands on his knees and listened eagerly.

"We'll go, won't we, mama?" he asked.

"Sometime, dear, not just now."

"*Why*, mama?" he asked, his countenance drooping.

"There are several reasons, Stanley. For one thing, you know grandpa is not well, and if anything should happen to him, papa ought to be here, hadn't he?" she answered.

"Y-e-s," the boy replied, slowly; for he still loved Grandpa Livermore next to his father and mother. He did not know that the letter contained a suggestion that, in case his father could not go he and his mother might go alone, and she did not tell him.

"What will you buy with this?" he asked, again turning the check over and reading it carefully.

"Why, I won't buy anything with it. Mama'll return it to Uncle Dick when she writes to thank him," she answered.

"Gee! I think that's awful! Wouldn't it be fun, though? When can we go, mama?" he asked all in one breath.

"What did you study to-day?" asked his mother, soberly.

"O, a lot of things," answered Stanley, knowing

at once what his mother meant.

"Any grammar?" she asked.

"A little," Stanley replied, trying to hide his rather subdued smile by going up and giving his mother her full share of hugs and kisses.

"You ought to write to grandpa to-night, Stanley, did you know it?" she asked.

"Do you suppose he will come down here this Christmas?" he asked, hopefully.

"I don't know, but you can write and tell him that papa will go for him and take him home if he will."

"O, couldn't I go, too?" teased Stanley.

"Just as papa says about that," she answered.

"Gracious, I'm hungry. Isn't it supper time?" he asked. "I've been hungry for *three hours*," he added.

"Papa'll be back in a little while," answered his mother. "He only went over to Thaxters."

"Have a game of pachisi, mama?" again asked Stanley, forgetting in the thought of that all about his stomach and supper, and starting for the board without waiting for an answer.

"Mama, if I do write to grandpa, can I use some of your nice paper? Please, mama?" he urged.

"That would depend on how hard my boy would try to write well, and to show grandpa how much he has improved," she replied.

"O, mama! Teacher said to-day that we've all got to write bertical after this—that the way you and papa and grandpa an' everybody writes is old-

fashioned, an' we've all got to do it bertical now an'—"

"Vertical, Stanley," corrected his mother.

"Yes, she says everything is going to be bertical, right up and down like this," said Stanley, going through gymnastics with his body and arm to demonstrate.

"V, v, Stanley, vertical," his mother again suggested.

"Well, the teacher said 'bertical,' " insisted Stanley, "I know she did, 'cause I punched Bertie Gordon in the back, and said, 'You're kind, Bertie, an' teacher, she—"

Stanley began to flounder for words, and again turned his attention to pachisi, but his mother was much more interested just then in the previous remark.

"She what?" His mother asked, and Stanley at once wished he had not ventured so far.

"Not much. She said that we had all got to learn 'bertical,' an',—can't we play, now, mama?"

"Did she say anything to you when you whispered to Bertie?" Mrs. Livermore asked.

"'Twan't whispering, mama. I just said, 'You're kind, Bertie, 'cause 'twas kind o' like his name, you know, an'—"

"But you meant him to *hear*, didn't you?"

"Yes, just for fun, you know, but—"

"But it wasn't fun, was it? What did the teacher do?"

"She—she—can't we play now, mama?"

"Not now. What did she do?"

Stanley's face commenced to go through contortions, showing his mother that he was everything but comfortable. However, the boy had never in his life told his mother a lie, and he could not, would not now. The truth came hard, but it was easier than to see the present expression on his mother's face. With a bang he thrust the board aside, and ran to her, putting his arms around her neck, and kissing her before he could say:

"She said 'twas whispering, and made me lose recess, and—'twasn't loud, mama," he added.

"But you disobeyed her, and forgot—what, Stanley?"

He did not answer.

"Forgot what?" she again asked.

"That I was a gentleman," he answered, "but I won't forget again, mama."

His look and tone were enough to make his mother respond to his embrace, and thus they were when Henry's footsteps were heard outside.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DISCUSSION

ONE Saturday morning Amy Bradford was going to the adjoining town to spend Sunday with her uncle's family, and she patiently coaxed Willa to accompany her on the ride. It was a glorious day in the latter part of May. Mrs. Warren herself joined with Amy in trying to persuade the girl to go. Willa had of late stayed in more than usual, because for weeks Mrs. Warren had neither felt nor acted like her usual self. Both her husband and Willa had been very much concerned over her, but she herself insisted that she was merely tired. The Doctor, however, feared for her nerves. Willa and Jennie, the maid, each took extra care to relieve her; nevertheless each day seemed to make her thinner, weaker, and more nervous.

On this particular morning, however, Willa, in order to please her mother, mounted Beauty and rode away by the side of Amy, having left her mother with the promise to be home by supper time. The ride was taken, and dinner accordingly enjoyed at their destination. At three o'clock, Willa started for home, thanking them all for the good time given her.

"Will see you Monday," called Amy as she gave Willa a cheerful wave of the hand in parting.

It was a warm afternoon for May. The wind was from behind, and before long Willa noticed that Beauty was sweating beneath his saddle.

"Poor Beauty! Warm day, isn't it?" she said, patting the side of his neck with one hand, and bringing him to a walk. The animal immediately swung his head up and down and gave a little snort, as though answering his mistress in the affirmative and glad for her consideration. Scarcely two miles had been covered, but it was early, and Willa did not see the need of hurrying.

"I wish, Beauty, we knew what ailed mama," she said aloud.

Another slight swing of his head made her feel that she was answered, that Beauty entered into her anxiety for her mother. The two were climbing the first steep hill that had come in their way since leaving Amy, when, on a level stretch behind, Willa heard the sound of a horse's hoofs.

Goodness! I hope it isn't,—but, of course it isn't. I won't look around, anyway," she said to herself.

"This *is* a pleasure," said Albert Hastings, as his horse came abreast of Beauty.

"O, Mr. Hastings! How do you do?" asked Willa, as though the thought that the approaching party might be he had never entered her mind.

"Mr. Hastings is very well, but he is much more concerned to know how Miss Warren is and how she happens to be so far from her home alone on this glorious day," he answered, with his blandest

smile.

Willa was angry, not slightly so, but angry to the very tips of her fingers. She had suddenly remembered Amy's having mentioned seeing one of the Misses Longley, Hastings's cousin, the evening before, and it was more than likely that any pretense of business which he might offer as an excuse for his being there at that hour would be utterly false. Willa had seen him before when she had longed for about five minutes to be a man; longed to see someone take the fellow by the collar of his ever immaculate, well fitting coat and shake him in a way to bring him to his senses, if he had any—in a way to take some of the conceit out of him—in a way to make him see just how little a man she really considered him. In this mood, Willa looked at him now, straight in the eye, and said:

"I had *business* this way, Mr. Hastings. I came over the road early this morning."

"Ah, indeed! Well, I had planned on spending this afternoon at the golf links, but suddenly learned of a business matter in this direction that needed my immediate attention, and business must come before pleasure. You will admit that, Miss Warren?"

"The *right* kind of business, yes," answered Willa.

Hastings for a moment winced under the tone, and then continued:

"Last Saturday was the opening game, and Sun-

day a few of us enjoyed the links. Never started so early before. You don't object to Sunday playing, do you, Miss Warren?" he added as though an after thought.

"Very strongly," answered Willa, instantly.

"Of course you would make a distinction, considering one's profession and his close confinement on other days, would you not?" he asked.

"In many ways, yes, but not when it comes to making almost a Fourth of July day out of that most sacred day of the week, Mr. Hastings," Willa replied.

"I don't quite understand you, Miss Warren. Pray tell me why I, for instance, shut up as I am through the week should not spend Sunday in God's glorious out-doors," said Hastings.

"I feel that it all depends on the spirit in which the day is spent. Pray tell *me*, Mr. Hastings, if, when you are at the golf links playing on a Sunday, you are thinking of God's out-of-doors, or thinking of the game."

"Gee! I'll draw her out. I like to hear her talk for she looks straight at a fellow when she is in earnest, but I'll change her views," he said to himself, but he turned to her, saying: "No matter what one does, it is his duty to do it to the best of his ability, is it not?"

"Most assuredly," answered Willa.

"Then, even though it is a game, he needs to think about it, does he not?" asked Hastings.

"But we are off from the subject. To my mind

the question is, 'is the game right or necessary on a Sunday?' " she answered.

"No, not necessary, but where's the harm, Miss Warren, where's the harm?" quired Hastings.

"Do you really want me to tell you just exactly how I feel about some of those things, Mr. Hastings?" asked Willa.

"Do, please do. If you can present any sane up-to-date reason, I should like to hear it," he answered with confidence.

"You will admit, Mr. Hastings, that when God put us here, he put in us three natures?" she asked.

Hastings would have been much better prepared had the topic under discussion begun with, "Know all men by these presents," or a familiar "whereas;" as it was, his first thought had been, "Animal, vegetable, and mineral," and then he remembered that this group referred to the kingdoms. For the life of him he could not think of any other group of "threes" that had come in his course of training, and he merely conceded a mild "yes," wondering all the time to what she referred.

"Three natures," she went on, "physical, mental, and moral."

"Surely, and what then?" he answered as though these three had been in his mind from the beginning.

"We must cultivate. He leaves that for us to do. The first, our physical, we cultivate by our exercise, work and play; our mental, by attending school, reading and studying; and our moral, by

enriching the spiritual life in us, partially by attending church, partially by reading the highest and best literature, but more by just thinking of God as our Father, of the Bible as his message to us,—by trying to be what He would have us be, and to do what He would have us do.”

Willa paused here, still looking at the young man by her side, and wondering how he had received her message. He did not answer, and she went on:

“I believe, Mr. Hastings, if any man or woman cultivates only one or even two of these natures, and leaves the other uncultivated, he or she, in God’s sight is just as much deformed as though born a hunchback, dwarf, cripple, or anything else. A person, in order to be an all round developed man or woman must be cultivated on all three sides. Is not that reasonable?” she asked.

Being a lawyer, her listener was not ready to concede the argument to this young woman, fair as she looked to him at that moment. Instead, he thought at once of his own graceful form, of which he had ever been proud, and said, “Can you call me a deformed man, Miss Warren? Can you, truly?” he asked.

“I am not your judge, Mr. Hastings. God knows your heart. He is the one to say,—He and you yourself,” she answered, soberly.

Again, he winced. He thought of the many times he had tried to deceive her, of the constant bluff he had made, of the way his conduct had been

influenced by the thought of her one day coming into the possession of not only all that Dr. Warren had accumulated, but all that Mr. Holway owned, as well. Was his moral nature cultivated? Was he an all round developed man? He shrank from answering the question even to himself.

"Whether you are a 'judge' or not," he said at last, "you would make a mighty good lawyer. I shall have to admit, Miss Warren, that I never thought of it in that light before. I guess you've won the argument, all right," he answered, playing with a part of his horse's mane.

"It was simply a little common sense, that was all," said Willa. "How else could one look at it and be fair to himself and fair to God?" she asked.

"This is a busy world, Miss Warren. Men to-day can't afford to take time to think about some of these things. They've too much to do," he replied, in a defensive tone.

"Can't afford *not* to take time, you mean, Mr. Hastings," answered Willa.

"I don't like talking this way, Miss Warren. Let's not spoil our little ride together by any such arguing," he answered.

"Did you not urge me to give you my candid opinion?" she asked.

"Surely, surely," replied Hastings, apologetically, but,—"

"And will you admit that your nature is not *broad* enough, not *deep* enough to hear the unbiased truth?" asked Willa, searchingly.

They were within half a mile of home. Hastings felt like kicking himself. Had he dreamed she could or would have spoken as she had, all might have been different. He could not answer. He still fumbled with the coarse, stubby mane of Prince. "I've been an ass," he said to himself, but before he had formed an answer fitting for Willa to hear, she said, hurriedly.

"Pardon me, "Mr. Hastings," and instantly reined Beauty to a curb stone.

"How do you do, Mr. Emmons? I wish to inquire for your mother," said Willa, reaching out a hand covered with a neatly fitting riding glove. "She didn't feel well at all yesterday," she added, her hand still within Robert's.

Hastings was keen enough to catch the look in each of their eyes as they shook hands; and he also detected a different tone in Willa's voice from any that had ever come to him.

"The jackass!" said Hastings. "I'll butcher him some day if—, O, thunder! She can't like him, that poor cuss, but he's just been made head bookkeeper. Perhaps that's turned his head. Old Holway likes him. Damn it all!" he muttered to himself.

He could not hear all that the two said, but enough to know that Willa was very solicitous about Robert's mother; and he was conscious, too, that their "good-by" was accompanied by another handshake.

"So you've turned missionary, have you?" he

sarcastically asked, as Willa again joined him, but Willa completely ignored the remark by saying:

"Pardon my leaving so abruptly, but Robert's mother and I are great friends. I love her dearly, and she was not at all well when I was there yesterday."

"Calls him 'Robert,' eh?" he said to himself, remembering that never in all their acquaintanceship had either ventured over the boundary line of ceremony.

"O, that old cripple of a woman, the one who wears the 'postage stamp' bonnet?" he asked, with one of his hearty laughs.

Willa could stand a slight, a slur made direct to her, but she could not stand one made against a friend. Her eyes blazed. It seemed as though they might have ignited the very atmosphere which her companion breathed.

"*Mrs. Emmons is my friend. Mrs. Emmons is a lady—lady enough to have brought up her son a gentleman!*" flashed Willa, giving Beauty her secret signal for speed, and away he dashed, his nose straight out, never looking to right nor left until he carried his fair rider into the yard of her own home.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE PROMISE

BEFORE Willa slept that night the bell was rung by a messenger from the leading florist of the town. A large box was passed her, and she asked the carrier to wait until she could look inside. Finding there, fastened to the stem of one of the many roses, a note from Hastings, she wheeled the paper wrapper around, put the fresh side out, and again folded it about the box, re-addressing it to "Albert Hastings, Esq." This little act was brief. The boy took the box with a sidewise look at the flushed face, and a smile of approval, for Hastings was no favorite with either young or old.

"Does he think flowers, or any of his parleying can take the sting out of his insult to-day? *Never!* Nothing but manhood can do that, and he isn't overburdened with that, I guess," Willa said to herself, turning more calmly to go to her mother's room.

The two remaining days in May, and each succeeding day in June found Mrs. Warren more and more nervous. Willa, in her care of her, almost forgot the incident of that Saturday. Her whole attention was needed in the home and with her mother. She and her father had agreed that Mrs. Warren should not be left alone. If both were

obliged to be away at the same hour, Grandma Holway relieved them by her presence. For a week the woman had kept her bed constantly, and yet she suffered no pain, no ache. The big man's heart bled and ached; he knew the nervous strain under which his wife was passing, and he longed for the day to come when possibly her mind might be put at rest. The sixteenth came. To-morrow would be Willa's twenty-first birthday. The girl herself had scarcely given it a thought. Her mind and heart were full of her mother's trouble, whatever that might be. Over and over again, she had consulted her father, but at these times she seemed to get no particular light. This night, the eve of her birthday, she beckoned him into his study.

"Papa, I want to tell you," she said. "I know there is something on her mind. She was either dreaming or delirious. Her eyes were closed, and I couldn't tell which, but she kept talking about the 'baby' and 'Willa' and 'baby clothes,' over and over; and then the 'woman' and letter." Everything was all jumbled up. I thought she might be thinking of Baby Angie, and got me mixed up with her. Do you think that was it?" asked Willa, resting both hands on the broad shoulders which of late had seemed a trifle stooped.

"No, Willa, I don't think mama was confusing you with Angie. Let's sit down, dear," he answered.

He drew her to the couch beside him, put an arm around her, and took both of her hands in one

of his.

"Mother is troubled, Willa," he said gently, "very, very troubled," he added in almost a whisper.

"Can't you tell me, father?" Willa asked, pleadingly.

"To-morrow," came the faint answer.

"To-morrow? Is it anything to do with me, father?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, darling, with you," he answered, drawing her to him and kissing her.

"With me? Why, father—anything that I have done—that I can help?" asked Willa.

"Nothing that you have done, nothing that you can help, Willa."

A long sigh of relief came from the girl.

"You will tell me to-morrow?" she asked. "In the morning?"

"To-morrow, in the morning," her father said, almost mechanically.

"It isn't any bad news, is it father?" Willa asked, in a tone of dread and fear.

"I don't know, darling," he answered.

"Don't know? Why, I thought you were to tell me to-morrow?" she replied, wonderingly.

"I'll tell you to-morrow. To-night, I do not know myself; at least, only a little of it. Then I hope I shall know all," the Doctor replied.

"About me—mother sick—tell me to-morrow—don't know now. Father, I don't understand," said Willa, leaning her head on his shoulder. "You

don't think mother'll die?" she asked, with dread.

"Not until the right time comes, if she has you and papa with her. You don't know how dearly she loves you, Willa," he said, patting her cheek, which had grown a little pale of late.

"She is the best mother in the world, and—you are the best father," she answered, again kissing him, while her eyes were filled with tears.

"You will never—leave us—until—until you marry, will you Willa?" he asked, brokenly.

"Why, what a silly papa! Of course I wouldn't. You couldn't get along without Willa, could you father?" she asked, cuddling up closer than before.

"No, darling, I don't think either of us could. It would break my heart, and I think it would kill her. You couldn't do either, could you?" he asked.

"Why, father! What a question! You know I would die before I would grieve either one of you intentionally. You know I would, don't you?" she asked.

"I believe you would, Willa, and no little girl or no big girl was ever loved more than we have loved you. You'll—never leave us—until—you—marry, will you, Willa?" he again asked, in almost the same words as before.

Like one chanting, Willa calmly said:

"Whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God."

The words came reverently and yet playfully, as Willa caressed the big man by her side. No answer

could have pleased him more at that time. He knew then that no matter what the morrow might hold, nothing could make Willa forget the sacred promise she had just given him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BREAKING THE SEAL

WILLA went to bed but not to sleep until the gray morning light was creeping through the closed shades of her cosy room. Something, she knew not what, was hanging over her. Her mind seemed in a whirl. Sometimes she felt as though she were stifling, and would throw both arms across the bed, trying to take in one long breath to refresh her. Never in all her life had such a feeling come to her. What could it mean?

"To-morrow, father'll tell me. I don't understand," she said to herself more times than she was years old. Hours passed before she lost herself in the restless, troubled sleep which failed to break at the usual rising hour.

In the room below Mrs. Warren had already opened her eyes. When she saw that her husband, also, was awake, she turned to him with the words, "Is this the day, Hunt?"

"It's the day, Margaret," he answered, sliding one arm under her head.

"Let us get up," she said, calmly.

"I'll get up, but you wait until I can bring you coffee," he answered, as though not in the least surprised at her suggestion.

She raised herself on her elbow, and then leaned

back, saying, "Very well, when you bring the coffee."

The Doctor hurriedly dressed, found that Jennie had the coffee nearly ready, and soon carried a cup of it to his wife.

"I am ready now," she said later, stepping from the bed the first time for over a week.

The Doctor understood nerves, and he let her carry out her own wishes. Soon she appeared in a dainty gown of blue and white challie, of which Willa was very fond, and with her hair done in her usual becoming way.

"It's Willa's birthday," she said, like one in a dream, as she approached him.

"It's Willa's birthday, mother," he answered, slipping his arm through hers and starting for the dining-room.

"We must have flowers. We always do," she said, looking at the table.

"So we do. I—"

"Let's go gather them. She may be up herself by that time," suggested Mrs. Warren.

"Just as you say. It is a glorious morning. I'm glad for that," he answered, opening a little drawer, and taking from it a pair of garden scissors. "I'll get a basket, mother," he added.

The two started, each conscious of the greatness of the hurt that this awful weight made on the heart of the other, and each trying for the sake of the other to be calm and cool and collected. Many different kinds of roses bloomed in their garden,

and some of each were gathered. They did not know that the two loving, loyal souls in the next house had seen them and wondered what had "come over Margaret," and were, in their curiosity, starting to join them.

"Why, it's father and mother," said Margaret, in surprise; and then, going toward them, said in the same even tones used on waking, "It's Willa's birthday, you know. Willa needs mother to-day. Mother'll stand by her."

The Doctor, putting his arm around her, said:

"Come, mother, let's go in."

His heart was so full he could not say more, but grandpa and grandma understood, and all went into the house together just as Willa came down the stairs.

"Mama!" she cried, catching sight of the dainty figure, the sight of which seemed almost too good to be true.

"I guess you are my birthday present," she added, loosening her embrace and looking into her mother's eyes.

"All ready for breakfast, now," said the Doctor: "Let's go in."

"The flowers. Let us fix them *now*," said his wife, with an emphasis on the last word which made the Doctor remember that there was something later not so cheery to take up their attention.

"I'll fix them," said Willa. "O, they are beauties," she cried. "The punch bowl will be just the thing. It will hold them all."

With the basket in one hand she started for the kitchen, thus giving grandpa and grandma a chance to slip a neat little white box by the side of another already at Willa's plate.

"She'll be brave. She knows that something is coming," said the Doctor.

"How?" asked the three.

"She was worried about her mother last night, and asked some straight questions which I answered," he replied.

"She doesn't mistrust?"

"Not that, no, but she knows there is something unusual that she is to hear to-day," replied the Doctor.

"I'm glad you prepared her. It's just like you," said his wife, with a sigh of relief.

Willa then joined them and the whole room was soon fragrant with the perfume of roses. The five were seated, for grandpa and grandma, although they had had their own breakfast, consented to have another cup of coffee with the "children" as they called the Doctor, Margaret, and Willa, who, seeing the packages by her plate, laughed her old childish laugh, exclaiming, "'You are the best foxes a little girl ever hed!' I wonder what it is!"

She first picked up the box on top, which was marked, "From Grandpa and Grandma," within which she found not a large but a genuine diamond ring, with her initials and the date inside.

"O, you dears, dears!" she cried, jumping from the table and going to give each of them a hug and

kiss; and then, back at her place again, she opened another box, repeating her expressions of joy to her father and mother before she could remove from its dainty resting place the delicately made chain and locket, the latter bearing her monogram, and enclosing, on one side a picture of her father; on the opposite, that of her mother.

"I'll love them always," she said with feeling, glancing first at the ring, and then caressing the locket on the chain about her neck.

Her father had been helping serve the breakfast and her mother pouring the coffee while Willa had enjoyed the surprises arranged for her. None of them ate much. To the older ones, all the joy savored of mockery when they realized the nature of what was ahead; nevertheless, all her life long, they had been as true to her as to their own, and they would continue to be.

Although Willa endeavored to be her own usual self, her heart all the while was anxious. She kept thinking of her father's words the evening before; and, when breakfast was finished, she slipped from her chair, went over to him, and, winding her arms around his neck, whispered, "Are you going to tell me now, father?"

He clasped both of his hands over hers for a few moments before he could say, "Just as you wish, dear."

"I want it now, please. It troubled me all last night, father," answered Willa.

"It troubled me, too, dear,—troubled us all, I

think," he answered, tenderly.

"Do they all know, father, all but me?" she asked.

"They know what I know, that is all. Do you want them to come with us into the study?" he asked, resolutely taking her arm in his.

Never in all his life had the man performed so hard a task. He felt as though life itself was slowly ebbing from him. Only the sound of Willa's voice enabled him again to face the problem before him.

"Of course, I want them all," she answered. "I feel awfully funny, father. You never did this before on any birthday, did you?"

"Over here, Willa," he said, leading her to the long sofa where they had sat the evening before.

Mrs. Warren, pale as death followed. Her father and mother dared not take their eyes from her, as she seated herself on the right of Willa. The Doctor nervously opened his safe, and took from within a long envelope, yellow with age. With that in his hand, he sat down on Willa's left. He winked hard. The muscles of his face jerked. Willa's eyes were on him. She had never seen him look like this before.

"What can it be?" she asked herself.

"You know there is something I want to tell you, Willa?" he at last said.

"No, papa. I think it is something you feel that you *must* tell me. I don't believe if you really *wanted* to tell me you would look like that," she

said, heroically.

"You know father, don't you, dear?" he replied, looking up at her.

Tears were in the eyes of all save Willa.

"I *must* do it; yes, Willa, *must* is the word," he answered.

"Go on," she said, encouragingly.

And then, in a sweet, tactful, resolute way he began at the beginning, and with stroke after stroke painted for the girl by his side, in the most delicate shades obtainable, the picture that he had carried in his mind ever since that eventful day so long ago. At first Willa saw only a country scene, a country home, and then she began to see a resemblance between the man belonging to it and her father; another, between the woman and her mother. Soon a shadow of the truth crept across her mind; she turned pale; her lips parted; her eyes almost looked through the speaker, as she said, "father, you—don't—mean—"

"Our darling," he breathed, folding his arms around her.

Each one seemed speechless, stunned, staggered. Willa's head drooped, and her mother cried:

"Water. She's fainted. *My Willa!*"

When again the big, blue eyes opened, Willa was on her own bed, her father on one side, her mother on the other.

"My Willa!" wailed her mother, pitifully.

Willa only closed her eyes again, and again became unconscious. Never were services rendered

more faithfully, heroically, lovingly. Grandpa and grandma took the two attendants whatever was needed. Not once did they leave her bedside until the opening of the eyes was accompanied by the faintest color in lips and cheeks. No word came. Only through her eyes did they know that she was conscious. These would open, look at the two watchers, and close again. For nearly three hours she lay in this condition; and then, when she kept her eyes open longer than usual, her mother slipped from the room to bring a cup of chicken broth. On her return, she found the Doctor kneeling by the bed, his head beside Willa's, and her arm thrown over him. No word had yet been spoken, but the mother knew that her child was slowly coming to herself again.

"Take this, dear. It will do you good," she said.

Willa did not answer, but lifted her arm from her father's neck, and allowed him to raise her in a position to drink. As soon as the last swallow was taken, she sank back among the pillows. For several moments she lay without moving a muscle, and then with a shudder she rose, looked from one to the other, saying, "The letter. It—"

Willa fell back, but did not finish her sentence.

"Here is the letter, dear. It is yours. When you are strong enough for it, you will tell father, won't you?" he asked, placing the letter in one of her hands.

Willa nodded, and moved her lips, but no sound

came.

"We love you so," said Mrs. Warren, climbing up on the back of Willa's bed, and lying down beside her.

"Mother!" said Willa, turning over and putting her arms around her.

"Thank God!" said the Doctor, slipping from the room and leaving the two together. "She called her 'Mother,' " he said under his breath.

Having told Jennie in the morning to refuse all calls for him, he threw himself on the sofa in his study and tried to think. From time to time he heard the murmur of voices above, and knew that his wife and Willa were talking. The sound seemed like music to him.

"So much is over," he said to himself, "but even now, we know no more than before," he added with a sigh. In a half hour's time, he heard steps, first above, and then on the stairs.

"Here, father," said Willa, passing him the letter.

"It's yours, Willa," he answered, rising. "Father wouldn't open it, unless—"

"We want you to. You read it. It has got to come sometime," she said, briefly, still clinging to her mother.

The words seemed to give the Doctor new courage. The shock to the girl had already been felt, and she had still called them, "father" and "mother."

"You break the seal, Willa. I won't betray the

trust she put in me, not even now," he said, passing the envelope to her again.

Willa took it, let it fall in her lap, and then buried her face in her hands. Whether she was saying a little prayer for strength, or simply dreading the task before her, neither knew. In a few moments, she lifted her head, raised the written address to her lips, and then walked to the window, gazing far to the east before she tore the end from the envelope and drew from within the folded sheets.

"Read," she again said, chokingly, passing them to her father.

"A Marriage Certificate," said the Doctor, unfolding the thickest paper.

"Emily May Livermore to Ernest Howard Stanton, May 16, 1870. Signed, Milton D. Thorndike, clergyman."

He paused, saying briefly to himself, "Livermore, Stanton."

"The letter" reminded Willa, anxious to know the worst at once.

A long sigh came from the Doctor as he unfolded the closely written sheets, prepared so long ago for Willa, their Willa—the mother's Willa, then.

"MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL:" It began.

"I wonder if ever a mother had such a hard task to perform as I have now. I want to tell you enough so that you will at all times understand my

action, and enough to make your mind at peace after you have heard all.

"I was brought up in what was considered a wealthy home, the daughter of Silas Nason Livermore, and loved as few children are loved. One day when I was twenty-two I met your father, Ernest Howard Stanton, who had been sent as foreman on an engineering job in our section. For six months he was in that locality. We met. We learned to love each other very, very dearly. My father, however, and my only brother, Charles Stanley Livermore, refused to recognize him."

"It is our Livermores!" Mrs. Warren exclaimed, "isn't it?"

"Yes, it must be," the Doctor answered. "Her brother must have been Henry's father. How strange!" he said, turning a page to continue:

"They so idolized me that I think they would have felt that no president, no prince was quite good enough for me. I was looking for nobility, but in character, not rank. They said, 'If you marry that Stanton, you never shall have a cent; you will be ignored in the will,' and as they spoke, I was saying to myself: 'I'll marry him or no one.'

"They meant their part. I meant mine. My mother was dead. I was of age. When Ernest's work was finished, he left and I left with him. All the money in the world couldn't have bought my love from me.

"My husband, for we were married at once, already had the offer of a new situation; and, thinking it would be more difficult for them should they try to trace us, he resigned his old and accepted the new, which took him to Los Angeles, California.

"For a time it seemed to me that I lived in heaven itself. I think your father was the best man I ever knew; at least, he was the best, the only one for me. After a year, a little boy came to keep us company, but God let him stay only a few short months. He was such a beautiful child that I always felt the angels wanted him to help make heaven more beautiful. And then, one day, about three months before you were born, your father was brought home crushed, mangled, but not dead.

"His most intimate friend, Willard Irving, broke the news to me as gently as possible. He stood by us through it all."

"Why, Hunt," again broke in Mrs. Warren. "Willard Irving,—it must be Clifford!"

"I don't think I could be surprised at anything now," he answered, and in a few moments he again read:

"I did everything, dear, that could be done. We had all the noted specialists for miles around. Our money went, but he had to go, too, just three weeks before you came.

"I had already suffered so much that I was in no condition to suffer more. When the doctors

found out the truth, they told me to go home if I could.

"I resolved that I would never go back, after being disowned as I was, and my only thought was of you. This Mr. Irving, your father's friend and mine, told me much of Dr. and Mrs. Warren, and through some other friend of his, I do not know whom, he learned that they had lost their own little girl. He urged me to go to them, tell them my story, and ask them to take you and bring you up as their own.

"Knowing, as I do, that my trouble is incurable, I dare not run the risk of telling them at this time who I am, lest they feel that they must report the case to my father, and I could not take anything from him now, after what he did to his baby girl. I am, therefore, going to try another course, of which they will tell you.

"If they keep you, and I do believe that God will answer my prayer that they may, I know that all good things will be done for you, and that you will be brought up in a way to prove a blessing to them as long as they live.

"God bless my little girl. May He ever let his angels hover about you, guarding you, and keeping you. In case you are still with them, and reading this on your twenty-first birthday, I pray, dear, that you may realize that they have been agents from God, taking the places of your father and me, and that you may never forsake them.

"Again, from the very depths of a mother's

heart, I say, 'God bless you and help you to think tenderly and kindly of the mother who is doing the hardest thing now that a true mother could possibly do. Be brave and good.'

"A heart full of love, from

"MOTHER."

CHAPTER XXXVII

HEART TO HEART

FOR days the Doctor and his wife noticed that Willa was troubled. She endeavored to appear the same and do the same, but her cheeks grew both thinner and paler. The Doctor knew, too, that she was not sleeping as she ought, for night after night he heard her tiptoe across the floor of her room above, sometimes to the window, sometimes in the direction of her desk. Several minutes would pass before she would again go to her bed. Never had she been more tender, more thoughtful of their comfort than now. Nothing escaped her. Everything was done, but the girl was troubled. The big man felt sure of that.

"What can we do? What can we do?" he asked himself over and over again.

A week passed, and again the Doctor called her to his study.

"I've been thinking, little girl, and I have a plan; or rather your mother and I have it together, and we want your approval," he said.

"It's something about me, I know. What is it, father?" asked Willa.

"Mother and I not only want you ours in name and heart, but we want you legally ours. You are all we have. We want to adopt you, so that you

will be Willa Warren in reality, our very own. We would be happier, and I think you would be, Willa," said the Doctor, tenderly.

"*Can* it be done? I *know* I should," Willa replied, eagerly.

"I am so glad," he said. "I will see about it just as soon as the Colonel returns. He'll be back in a day or two. Legal papers will have to be made out, and I had rather have him attend to them than Hastings, although done in the office, I suppose he will have to know about it."

"I don't care for Hastings, nor for what he thinks," said Willa, who then told her father of that last ride with him, of the flowers and the letter afterward, and her return of them.

"You are all right, Willa," said her father, putting one arm around her and patting her head with the hand of the other. "Emmons is a gentleman," he went on, "and you did right to stand up for him and his mother."

Willa did not answer, but something, she scarcely knew what, made her feel glad that her father spoke as he did.

"I'll see about the papers. Mother will be so glad," he continued.

The next afternoon Willa went to the stable, and the very sight of her made Beauty coax for a gallop. He whinnied, he stepped around, he stretched out his nose toward her, he bowed his neck, and finally, in his delight, he jumped, lifting for the moment all four feet from the floor.

"You dear old boy," said Willa, going to him and caressing him like a human being. "We'll have the saddle on. We will, Beauty. You just wait," she said, going to the stable door.

"Mike! Mike!" she called, to the joint helper of the two families.

"Och. Yis, Miss Willa, I'll shtop, an' be right wid yees," answered Mike in a high key.

"Will you saddle Beauty, please Mike, and bring him around? I can't stand his coaxing any longer," said Willa.

"Yis, Miss Willa, Mike'll saddle Beauty, fer sure, an' it's proud he'll ba to do it," said Mike. "Ha's been warntin' a spane this mony a day," he added.

"Thank you, Mike," answered Willa, tripping to the house more like her old self than Mike or anyone else had seen her for days.

When on Beauty's back, she let him follow his own inclination, rather than her own, except inasmuch as their wishes agreed. To Willa's amazement he first took her around this square and that square, and then started straight out on the Main street itself to the suburb of Lakeville, out to Mrs. Emmons's. Without a word from his rider he stopped at the door of her friend and his friend; for there, the lot was fenced in, and he was allowed to crop all the grass he liked. Willa was forced to smile and to pat him gently when she saw what he had done. Quickly she dismounted, lowered the check, made the usual slipknot and left him.

"You blessed dear," said Mrs. Emmons. "Where have you been?" she asked.

Willa told her of her mother's illturn, of her necessary stay at home, but did not tell her of the news that had so nearly crushed her.

So many days having passed since the two had been together, Mrs. Emmons could not accept a "no" from Willa when inviting her to stay for supper. When the visitor saw that her friend would not only feel sorry, but hurt, she consented; and, strangely at that very moment, recalled her father's words and tone of the evening before. At five Robert came. Everything was as usual. All were apparently happy. When the clock struck seven, Willa told them she must go. Robert started for Beauty, but evidently Beauty was not in so great a hurry as Willa; for, when he saw Robert approaching, he lifted his head and started on, looking back frequently enough to make sure he was in the lead. Willa and his mother watched from the kitchen window, and laughed at every fresh attempt on Robert's part.

"You mischief, Beauty! I'll have to go myself," said Willa. He'd follow me to the North Pole if I should start."

"It's too bad, but the grass isn't damp yet, I guess," said the old lady.

"O, no, that's all right, but I shall have to go. Beauty is just that stubborn," replied Willa, who said "good-by" and started for the trouble maker, promising another visit in the near future.

At sight of her, Beauty wheeled, tossed his head, and started toward her.

"You bad Beauty! You shouldn't tease anyone like that," said Willa, and Beauty for answer swung his head around to look at Robert as much as to say, "I wouldn't for you, but I will for her."

"I see you will," said Robert, laughing. "But isn't he a knowing one?" he added, turning to Willa.

"Beauty is worth his weight in gold," answered Willa, "aren't you, Beauty?" she asked, leaning her face against his and patting him, never thinking at that moment that Robert was looking on, wishing down deep in his heart that he might be in Beauty's place for just five minutes.

"I am sorry to have bothered you, but I thank you just the same," said Willa, extending her hand.

Robert took it in a hearty, earnest grasp, and as he did so, their eyes met in a different way from that in the past. One focus was reached and for several seconds it seemed as though neither one could move a lid or a muscle. They stood there as though riveted to the spot. Their lips never moved to speak a word. Neither could have measured the seconds that passed. At last, they seemed at the same moment to realize that this would not do. Their hands separated, their eyes fell, and Willa reached for the reins. It seemed to her that in the past days, months, now years since she had first known who he was, and later known him, she had never really seen his true self before. To her,

it seemed that in that space of time her soul and his soul had met for the first time, and that they had much to say to each other; and, letting their souls talk, their lips did not need to. Never, in all their lives, had they really said half so much as in those few brief moments. Willa felt that Robert had never looked so strong, so manly, so frank, so honest, so noble.

The next moment she was on Beauty's back. She couldn't have told how she got there, but there she was; and, taking the reins, she saw his hand extended quickly, heard a quick "good-by," which was as quickly returned, and Beauty started.

Willa's heart beat in a new way. She tried to calm Beauty down to a steady walk. She wanted a chance to think, and think she did; not only then, but long after she went to her room that night. She could do nothing but think, and her thoughts, somehow, brought her a new joy that drove the needed sleep away.

Morning came, and in the first mail she found a brief note, penned the evening before. It read:

"DEAR WILLA:

"For a long time I have waited until you were twenty-one before telling you that I love you. Tonight I felt the time had come, that I could not wait longer. Can you, Willa, can you return that love and consent to be my wife?

"Yours in all sincerity,

"ROBERT."

When Willa read the note she ran to her room without a word, and shut the door. She threw herself on the bed and cried as though crying was the only thing in all the world to do at that particular moment. She knew not what caused the tears. They just came. Between the different outbreaks she read and re-read the note until each word in it seemed branded on her brain never to be erased. When over an hour had passed, she heard her father's step, and his voice at her door, saying, "May I come, Willa?"

Three times he called before he heard any response. She then unlocked the door, replying, "Yes, father. It's all right."

"You look as though it was all wrong. What is it, Willa? Can't you tell father?"

For answer she passed him the note, and walked to the window, looking out on the lawn.

The Doctor read it, drew a deep breath, waited a few moments, and then joined her with the one word, "Well?"

"I love him, father," she said bravely, although the words were scarcely above a whisper.

"I know it, dear. I have known it for a long time, Willa," he answered.

"How?" she asked, wonderingly.

"In a lot of ways," he replied. "You didn't speak of him the same as you do of Hastings and all the others, and you look differently when he is mentioned; besides I was sort of prepared, for long ago I knew that he loved you."

"How, father?" she again asked.

Dr. Warren then told her of the noble step taken more than two years before, and of the young man's promise to wait until—"

"He doesn't know?" gasped Willa.

"No, nothing," answered her father, "except that you would promise no one until after you were twenty-one. He has been a patient boy, and a good one, Willa."

"I know it. What shall I say?" she asked.

"Whatever your own heart tells you to, Willa," the Doctor answered, gently.

"I ought to tell mother," she said.

"Yes, we'll tell her," he answered.

* * * * *

The following morning Robert received a note briefer than his own; it contained only the one word, "Come," but that word made his whole day happy. What was ahead of him? He scarcely dared think. The figures on ledger and journal seemed dancing, playing around, first, the word "Willa," and then the word, "come," until Robert had to use all his will power to pull himself together.

When evening came he followed the command of his love; he went to Willa.

The two faced each other. Their eyes again met as on the previous evening, and—Robert understood. In a moment, Willa was in his arms. He had done his waiting in the past. He could not wait now. Her face was close to his, and he

showered it with kisses, her forehead, her cheeks, her lips.

"Forgive me, dear," he said at last, "but I love you so."

For answer, Willa simply hid her face on his shoulder and waited.

"Let's sit down," he said, "you are trembling."

He led her to a divan. To Willa it was the happiest moment she had ever known. Surely, all other happy hours faded into nothingness when compared with this; and Robert thought he had found heaven itself.

Many minutes passed before either could speak of anything except their love and their present happiness.

"But I must tell you something," said Willa. "So far, I have only said that I love you. Before I promise to marry you, you must know—"

"What, Willa?" gasped Robert.

And Willa told him of the shock that had so recently come to her; of what a struggle it had been, of how glad she was that her father had partially prepared her the evening before, exacting from her her promise to stay with them until she married, no matter what might happen; for had he not done so, she feared the grief was so awful that she would have run away, or done something dreadful, but her promise had held her until she had once more gained control of herself.

"And," she added, "father and I talked the other night. He is to go to-morrow, if Col. Longley

returns, and have the necessary papers made out, so that I may be legally as well as morally theirs, and have a right to their name."

"Until you have a right to mine," said Robert, drawing her to him and kissing her.

"You don't mind, then?" she asked.

"Mind what?" asked Robert.

"That I am not their very, very own child?"

"Willa, it is *you*, you I love, and it is *you* I want. Do you want me?" he asked, holding her from him and looking straight into those frank blue eyes.

Willa met them. "And I want you," she said.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CHANGES

DURING the next few days it was learned that Col. Longley had wired that he would not return for another month.

"I want it over with. I'll let Hastings do it," said the Doctor.

No one was ever more surprised than Albert Hastings when he learned the nature of Dr. Warren's errand. The papers such as he deemed necessary were made out, to one of which he wished to have the signature of Charles Stanley Livermore if he still lived. The Doctor, knowing the awkwardness of such an explanation through letter, suggested that the two take the trip to Mr. Livermore's home, and tell him the story direct. It was agreed, and the two went on the following day.

To the Doctor's astonishment he found the old man in a condition on which he had not planned. When Mr. Livermore heard them talking of "Emily" and "Willa" at the Doctor's, he lost the name "Willa" completely.

"Emily—yes—little Em—take me to her. Yes, —little Em. She'll know Bud," and thus the old man rambled on, as he trotted around from room to room, and finally appeared wearing his silk hat

and linen duster, for it was a hot day. In one hand was his gold-mounted cane which had been his pride from a young man up.

Hastings looked at the Doctor in bewilderment. The Doctor looked at the pathetic creature before him.

"Very well. You will feel better when you see her," he answered, his whole heart full of tender pity for his brother man.

The three started. It was a two hours' ride by train. The old man all the while kept mumbling to himself something about "little sister,—little Em."

The Doctor with his natural forethought had wired home: "Bringing old gentleman. Weak. Thinks W is Em."

"Can't do business this way. Will see you tomorrow, Hastings," said the Doctor at the carriage door, on their arrival, thus giving the young man no chance to witness any scene within, and no chance to see Willa.

"He's my really true uncle, mother?" asked Willa, as they saw the stranger accompanying the Doctor up the path.

"Your mother's brother, dear," Mrs. Warren answered.

"I knew you would come back, Emily. I knew you would come back. I'm old, but you haven't grown old at all. You are just the same as when—" The old man stopped. He could not say the words.

The Doctor nodded to Willa, as he said, "She's

just the same, isn't she grandpa?"

Willa saw from her father's tone and look that he thought it wiser to humor the old man in his whim, and she did.

None of the onlookers realized what many of the old man's memories were at that time, nor the shock that they were giving his already weakened system. When he grew exhausted, he lay down, coaxing Willa to "sit beside Bud." Willa did, and gently fanned him until he had fallen into a child-like sleep. The Doctor studied his breathing. Finally he said:

"I'm going to telephone for Henry."

This he did, telling him as delicately as he could the situation before him, and adding, "I wouldn't be surprised at anything. You better see him yourself."

The morning train brought Henry and little Stanley, whom Dr. Livermore had taken with him for a double purpose. Stanley was a favorite with his grandfather, and the sight of him might bring the old man to his normal self for at least a few moments at a time; and further still, because the boy, with his loneliness in his father's absence, and his anxiety over his grandfather's condition might prove too much for his mother's nerves, as the long hoped for "little Emily" was only two weeks old.

For the first half hour after their arrival, the old man seemed almost normal. He talked to Henry of Emily's money, his wishes, the old place,

and then he asked for "Emily" to come.

They called Willa. "You've forgiven me?" he asked as he reached for her hand.

"Yes, uncle," answered Willa.

"No—no—no uncle," said the old man, scowling. "Bud, Bud, call me 'Bud' the way you used to."

Willa looked to her father for courage, and then said:

"It is all right, Bud. Emily forgives you."

The tears rushed to Willa's eyes, and she dropped in a heap by the bedside, burying her face in the snow white spread.

"Little sister," said the old man, trying to place his hand on the top of Willa's head.

Those were his last words. For three days he lay in a stupor—and all was over.

* * * * *

He was taken back to his old place and laid beside Henry's mother.

* * * * *

In the old Livermore home, the young man told the Doctor all that he knew on the subject, told him of his discovery and his father's discovery of the childish likeness of Willa to his Aunt Emily, and of their final decision that it was merely a coincidence; he told him of his grandfather's property, which rightfully should have been divided equally between his two living children, his father and his Aunt Emily at the time; of his father's poor investments, lessening his own share until only the

old home remained, with merely enough for the old man's maintenance, which accounted for Henry's having helped himself from the very first, for he did not mean that anything done for him should take the old home out of the Livermore name. He told him, also, of his father's steadfastly holding to his resolution not to touch a cent of his sister's share, which had been increasing all these years, and which, the last that he knew had amounted to over thirty-seven thousand dollars.

"Her's belongs to Willa. She is my cousin, you know," he said.

Doctor Warren seemed stunned. His mind had been on something beside property. At last he said:

"Yes, she is your cousin."

"And you will tell her?" asked Henry.

"I will tell her, but you will stop at our place on your way home?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, I will stop. I want to see her again," answered Henry.

* * * * *

When the Doctor told Willa, the first question that arose in her mind was what would her mother wish her to do? If this money had been denied her mother, whose right came first, ought she to take it?

Her father and mother and she talked earnestly. To be sure, the fact that Mr. Livermore had repented changed the situation to some extent. Again Willa thought of Henry, who by his father's early investments had been deprived of what rightfully

was his.

"I know what I'll do. Please let me do it," she pleaded.

"What?" asked both.

"Tell Henry that I will take half, provided he will take the other half. If not, I do not want any of it. I would not be happy with it. I'd think of—" She stopped. She could not say "mother" of any but the woman beside her. "Of her," she at last continued.

"You can tell him. He will be here next Monday," said the Doctor, with renewed admiration and respect for the young girl that they both loved as their life.

* * * * *

Henry came, business was discussed, and finally settled against his wishes, but in the only way possible; for Willa's mind was made up and there was no changing it.

When it was over, he said, "I have got to tell you something else."

"Yes?" they all answered.

"You know that the news of father's death was in the papers?"

"Yes," answered the Doctor.

"Two days after he was buried I received a note dated at Linton Corner. Read it," he said, passing it to the Doctor and Willa who were seated near each other.

Together they read:

"Dear Henry I hev jest heard of your pa's death. will you come to me. I otter told him. Its bout Emily.

"Yours truly,

"NANCY."

When they had finished, both looked at the one to whom the note was addressed.

"I was not half so big as Stanley when Nancy got married, but I remembered her, and I hunted her out. You know the letter you let me read?" he asked.

The Doctor nodded.

"It seems Aunt Em went to Nancy's. She died there, and was buried as Nancy's niece. The neighbors did not know the difference. She showed me where,—and—" Henry halted. Willa had lowered her head in her hands and all hearts ached for her.

"Go on," said the Doctor, tenderly laying his hand on Willa's shoulder.

Henry's voice shook and his eyes filled with tears as he said:

"I laid her beside father. He's found his 'little Em' at last."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE PICTURE'S PERSPECTIVE

CHRISTMAS DAY of the following year brought very different thoughts and scenes to the Warren home in Ripley. It was Willa's wedding day. Her old chums, Dorothy and Amy were bridesmaids; and James Davis, a young man at the bank, was best man. The ceremony was performed at high noon by the Rev. Alexander Lockwood, D. D. Among their out of town guests were Henry, Emily and Stanley, from Canton; and Si, Hannah, Joseph, and Lawrence from Woodrow.

Willa made a beautiful bride, indeed. As she walked in by her father's side, tall, graceful, dignified, gowned in white point de esprit over white silk, and crowned by the bridal veil that had been worn by Mrs. Warren, so long before when taking similar steps which had linked her life with that of Hunt M. Warren, all eyes were on her, and those of her future husband seemed riveted on the approaching figure. They never wavered until she was by his side. The ceremony was brief, but beautiful. No hearts were so deeply touched as those of Dr. and Mrs. Warren, and Robert's mother, whom they saw was shown every possible attention; indeed, the two, together with Mr. and Mrs. Holway, insisted that she remain with them during the

weeks of the honeymoon which were to be spent in California, with "Auntie Mabel," Hallie, and Clifford, that loyal friend of Willa's father and mother, the one whom she needed to thank for being the means of guiding her to such blessed people and such a blessed home—the one who had guarded their secret so loyally during all these years.

Dinner was served, the two started, but not until a few brief heart to heart talks were had with those she loved best, best with the exception of Robert who was now a part of herself.

Wedding presents had poured in from all sides. The one that meant most to the young couple was a deed made out in Willa's name of the place across the street, which house stood on the spot opposite the space between her old home and that of grandpa and grandma. This was a present from the four, who had found that they loved Willa too well not to have her as near to them as possible.

During the weeks of her absence the inside of the house was newly whitened, painted, and papered; and contract made for the outside work to be done in the spring.

"I would love to furnish it," said Mrs. Warren one day, "but a bride does take so much comfort in doing that for her own home that I cannot deprive Willa of the pleasure."

"No, we'll wait. We'll keep them here while they are settling, won't we?" answered the Doctor.

During their six weeks' holiday, no morning passed when a message did not reach the home peo-

ple from the "children," and sometimes, night brought another. Without these, the days would have been lonesome ones, indeed.

* * * * *

Five years have passed. Grandma Emmons has left them, but she left behind to the town a noble legacy in her son; for, both because it was his nature, and because of his great love for his wife, Robert had made the most and the best of his opportunities. When Mr. Bradford had suddenly dropped dead at his desk, Robert had unanimously been chosen to fill his place at the bank as cashier. The three houses had been named, "The happy triangle," so united were the inmates, and nothing added more to the comfort and happiness of all than the presence of four-year-old Hunt Warren Emmons, and Baby Margaret, who had come to make them a visit, the length of which rested with God.

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